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MODERN DRAMA

A Journal Devoted to the
Drama Since Ibsen

Issued four times yearly—May, September, December, and February. Subscription price \$2.00. Single copies 75c. Articles should not exceed 8,000 words. Book reviews should be limited to 500 words. Address contributions to A. C. Edwards, Department of English, University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas.

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MODERN DRAMA

VOLUME 2

MAY, 1959

NUMBER 1

Foreword

Modern Drama has two announcements to make:

Jacques Scherer, Professeur d'Histoire et Technique du Théâtre Français à la Sorbonne, will be our foreign editor. M. Scherer will review the Paris season annually, see to it that important French work in modern drama is reviewed, and encourage contributions from abroad. *Modern Drama* is fortunate to have M. Scherer's advice.

The September, 1959, number of *Modern Drama* will be devoted exclusively to Shaw. The following is only a partial listing of the contributors.

Bertolt Brecht Ovation for Shaw

William Irvine Shaw and America

Walter N. King The Rhetoric of *Candida*

Frederick P.W. McDowell

 "The Eternal Against the Expedient": Structure
 and Theme in *The Apple Cart*

Arthur H. Nethercot

 Bernard Shaw, Ladies and Gentlemen

Marvin Carlson

 A Decade of Shaw Bibliography (1945-1955)

Jack Kalmar Shaw's Art Criticism

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BEN SIEGEL. Chairman of English at the California State Polytechnic College in Pomona, Professor Siegel is currently engaged in compiling a bibliography of the *Bible* in fiction, with a drama section.

GEORGE E. WELLWARTH. Formerly an instructor of English at Chicago City Jr. College, the University of Chicago and Indiana University, Mr. Wellwarth is spending a year in Europe in order to collect material for a book on the contemporary European theater.

P. M. MITCHELL. A specialist in the field of Danish literature, Mr. Mitchell teaches at the University of Illinois.

WILLIS KNAPP JONES. Professor Jones is a member of the Department of Romance Languages at Miami University, Oxford, Ohio. His translation of Florencio Sanchez' plays will be published in July, 1959. He is now working on *Behind Latin American Footlights*.

COMEDY AND TRAGEDY IN CHRISTOPHER FRY

BROADWAY CRITICS SOME TIME AGO declared themselves puzzled or uncertain as to Christopher Fry's sole tragedy *The Firstborn*. It had not left them with that rosy glow which most of this playwright's work diffuses. When, in the autumn of 1950, his comedy *The Lady's not for Burning* was performed, New York showed itself quick on the up-take. Whereas, stated *Time*, *The Cocktail Party* had "sent the audience stumping out of the theatre on its knees, pricing bad bargains out of the corner of its eye, Fry's audience pranced out into the welcoming night their eyes peeled for a pretty girl to hug or a fellow being to clap on the shoulder." Certainly *The Firstborn* is not in this pattern. It hasn't the bouquet and Happy Birthday touch. It is more like an Elizabethan Tchekhov—a blank-verse *Cherry Orchard* with the death-beetle ticking.

The obvious remark at this point is that the plays are in different genres; *The Lady's not for Burning* being written on comedic, *The Firstborn* on tragic lines. But in fact Fry has so horsed around with tragic and comic ingredients that this elementary distinction doesn't hold. All of his comedies skim close to death. In *A Phoenix too Frequent* the young Roman corporal is nearly court-martialled for a capital offense, and there is some gruesome play with corpses as well as a necrophilic desire for immolation on the lady's part. In *Venus Observed* the Duke's observatory is set on fire by a jealous ex-mistress and the Duke and Perpetua are almost burned alive. In *The Lady's not for Burning* the heroine escapes over-night from the faggots and the stake in company with a war-sickened captain who so despaired of life that he desired to be hung. Fry's last comedy *The Dark is Light Enough* sails even nearer the coast of shadows and at two places touches shore. The Countess Rosmarin dies on the stage, her quietist task of restoring confidence to neurotic Richard Gettner accomplished. He, in his turn, gives himself up to the army from which he has deserted, perhaps to receive a penalty of death.

Hair-breadth escapes from the direst fate are, of course, the comic dramatist's stock-in-trade; but with Fry this rescue-in-the-nick-of-time is not, we see, invariably forthcoming. The wings of the angel of death are heard, and the pinions in this play do not pass over. To affix labels and term Fry's dramas "tragi-comedies" like Beaumont and Fletcher's, or to use Byron's epithet "serio-comedy" does not get us very far. Of these two, the last is the best. It does at least suggest an underlying meaning, an end far removed from the purpose of farce. "Progress,"

writes the playwright in a note of dedication to his festival drama *A Sleep of Prisoners*, "is the growth of vision: the increased perception of what makes for life and what makes for death," and he goes on to state how he has sought "to find a way for comedy to say something of this, since comedy is an essential part of men's understanding." Here Fry makes his position quite clear. We assume from the run of humorous plays that comedy as a dramatic form concerns itself with society's conventions, and—for all its ironies—finally respects the "appearance" of things. We think perhaps of Molière—that mocker of hypocrisy from the standpoint of bourgeois virtue. We understand it as the art par excellence, *pour amuser les honnêtes hommes*. But Pascal knew that the poet is not to be classed as an *honnête homme*; and Fry's comic vision is essentially poetic: an exploration, not a static assessment. Fry himself has resorted to this word to describe the human task when confronted by mass danger.

Thank God our time is now when wrong
Comes up to face us everywhere,
Never to leave us till we take
The longest stride of soul men ever took.
Affairs are now soul size
The enterprise
Is exploration into God

declares the old ex-donkeyman Private Meadows in *A Sleep of Prisoners*. All Fry's dramatic enterprise constitutes an "exploration into God," and if the zany jingling of his verse, his puns, his wit, his virtuosity have left the suppered theatergoer only with a eupeptic aftermath the fault is not with the text and its actors. "I could see no reason," wrote Fry (of that "first cousin to an artificial comedy," *The Lady's not for Burning*) "why I should not treat the world as I see it, a world in which we are all poised on the edge of eternity, a world which has deeps and shadows of mystery, in which God is anything but a sleeping partner." Here, indeed, was the recipe for an artificial comedy with a difference. Fry's West-end theaterwise sense—the sparkle and smartness of his repartee—have sometimes led his more surface-minded fans to look upon him as a verse Noel Coward. His translation of Jean Anouilh—that light-fingered pierrot of the poetic—undoubtedly strengthened this belief. Fry is the guy, it was commonly assumed, who could spout in metaphor and still stay slick. London audiences hate to have to think. To feel, they consider, is bad enough. The West-end theater exists as an evening nursery for the mentally middle-aged. Gentle stimulation, then bland reassurance is what stacks up the box-office till. To write a comedy for those who have come for a cup of Benger's Food or for winkles and champagne is no *carte-blanc* commission for a thinker. Fry has got by with it by supplying all the titillating trinkets and trim-

mings. And those who have raved about his tinsel and rococo have been quite content to forego the central substance.

What this is cannot be expressed in any ready formula, but there is something of paradox about it—a sense of dialectical incongruities. We get this hinted at in the comedies, when Doto the tipsy maid-servant (in *A Phoenix too Frequent*) tells the taking and bewildered young soldier:

life and death
Is cat and dog in this double-bed of a world.

In *The Firstborn*, this under-play of opposites assumes a more brooding dress of words, as when Moses declares:

I do not know why the necessity of God
Should feed on grief: but it seems so. And to know it
Is not to grieve less, but to see grief grow big
With what has died, and in some spirit differently
Bear it back to life.

Or, again, when he is tempted to see "Man's life go forward only by guilt and guilt."

Kierkegaard puts the matter in this fashion. The paradox or the inexplicable, he says, is a category on its own. "It is the duty of the human understanding to understand that there are things which it cannot understand, and what those things are. Human understanding has vulgarly occupied itself with nothing but understanding, but if it would only take the trouble to understand itself at the same time it would simply have to posit the paradox." One is reminded by this passage of Peter Able's prayer for assistance while dicing with a fellow Private in the dream-scenes of *A Sleep of Prisoners*:

Deal me high, deal me low.
Make my deeds
My nameless deeds.
I know I do not know.

"I know I do not know"—here, in this line, is man's humility, his awe, before the divine and the numinous. And all of Fry's art is finally bent on communicating some intimation of the luminous assenting ignorance of this fact. To convey this resonance of acceptance and non-knowledge calls for a special mode of art. As Wittgenstein has remarked, "What can be shown, cannot be said. . . . There is, indeed, the inexpressible. This *shows* itself; it is the mystical." Revelatory rather than reasoned (though argument follows from this revelation), Fry's drama seeks to preserve a sense of inextricable oppositions. His four comedies are all tugs-of-war between the life- and death-instincts. A woman mourns a husband and decides to die; a mercenary soldier, sick of carnage, despises life and desires to be hanged; an old philanderer, hardened in

selfhood, despairs of resolving love by marriage; a *manqué* poet deserts from duty, fearing the dead self he bears inside him. In each of these comedies, Thanatos makes a tough stand before the conquering Eros; and in the last, *The Dark is Light Enough*, both life and death triumph as the curtain descends.

Fry has described tragedy as a demonstration of man's dilemma, and comedy as a comment upon this demonstration. The definition serves to show his sense of the closeness between these two forms, and the reason why the tragic so often over-laps the determining element in his comedies.

The Firstborn was Fry's second published play (*The Boy with a Cart* being first off the line); and I remember with what brooding attention its author would regard the script when we were both in the Forces. Down by the banks of the Avon, at Pershore (in Worcestershire), Fry would take his drafts and pour upon them when exigencies of khaki allowed him time off. Written during the War, it reflects the debate between authority and freedom as embodied in the characters of Pharaoh and Moses. In the language of current politics, the play can be seen as an impassioned plea for self-determination—an assertion of the rights of the Jewish race to evolve their own ethos under providential contract. As Moses, ex-prince of Egypt, tells the Pharaoh:

My people shall become themselves,
By reason of their own god who speaks within them.

But Seti the Pharaoh, who represents the supremacy of Egypt and its great imperial past, cannot understand this awakening ethnic logic, and determines to hold Moses' countrymen by force. Freedom wins the day as *Exodus* proclaims, but at a cost of waste and devastation. After the plagues which smite Egypt, the Pharaoh is left a shattered man, his beloved son and heir-apparent struck down by the Angel of Death along with all the first-born of the land.

Part of the magnitude of the play comes from the fact that the Pharaoh is presented not as a consciously evil man. He has sacrificed all—his health, his peace of mind, his family affection—to dynastic causes, to the civilizing mission of Egypt and its traditionally vast historical role. Pharaoh's dilemma is the dilemma which comes to all rulers of empire. But Egypt's day is closing. It is later than he thinks. His son Ramses, before his death, is sacrificed also to this absolutist burden. Rebelliously, he expostulates with his father:

I'm to inherit the kingdom
Of desperate wishes, to be not myself
But a glove disguising your hand. Is there nowhere
Where I can come upon my own shape
Between the overbearing ends of Egypt?
Where am I to look for life?

Moses, too, carries the scars of renouncing his private life to redeem his people. As he says to Pharaoh's son who pleads on behalf of plague-harried Egypt:

You appeal to Moses,
But Moses is now only a name and an obedience.

He has offered up his individual hopes—his love and ambitions—for his race. From the Bible we can guess at the honored position which Moses once held in the royal household; and Fry imagines him as a general who has served with renown in the Egyptian Forces. He imagines, likewise, a deep love-tie between Pharaoh's sister, the princess Anath, and Moses (whom she, as a girl, had discovered in the cradle of bul-rushes). This, also, goes over-board in the terrible lust of Egypt to hold, the burning desire of the Jews to be free.

A religious and historical drama of moment, *The Firstborn* is very much a play for the time. It speaks to a world whose problems include Cyprus, Algiers, Hungary, and Poland. And it speaks in a prophetic but non-party voice. *The Firstborn* deals with the tyranny of power, but does not over-simplify things by making the Pharaoh the villain of the piece. Instead, it shows him as a dedicated man dominated by imperial abstractions—by notions which history was seeking to transcend. Least known, it is probably the finest of Fry's works.

DEREK STANFORD

DRAMATIC VALUES, YEATS, AND THE COUNTESS CATHLEEN

THE VIEW THAT WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS was never much of a playwright has been expounded so often that it is now a truism of the theater. Eric Bentley, for one, deplures Yeats's fascination with the literary language of the nineteenth century, "the feeblest language in all modern literature." It is possible, as Bentley suggests, that blank verse has long since exhausted its dramatic possibilities. "One cannot quote from his plays any passage of indubitable greatness or many of indubitable brilliance."¹

Bentley's praise is hedged with reservations, despite the statement that Yeats "is a considerable playwright, the only considerable verse playwright in English for several hundred years." It acknowledges the fact that Yeats knew what he wanted, and that he created both the theater and the tradition necessary for communication. It speaks of Yeats as a classic dramatist who cuts everything away from the dramatic situation. There exists in each play "a single knot, a rather loose one, which is untied in a single movement." Each play comes from a first-hand acquaintance with the theater, and from a desire to subordinate music, dance, and stage design to language. But the thesis praises Yeats at Eliot's expense; Yeats, it turns out, is doing something that Eliot cannot do. The former writes for actors, the latter for elocutionists. The praise of Yeats sounds weakly, as from an echo chamber. To claim that drama results from the overlapping of literature and theater is to repeat another truism, one no less deadly to an understanding of what Yeats really accomplished than the reference to an "undramatic tendency that is more or less evident in all Mr. Yeats's dramatic work. . . . The plot counts for nothing, and the characters have but the outer semblance of men. They are mere symbols that enclose a mood, and lack the vital blend of action, thought, and emotion that belong to complete and complex humanity."²

Another objection to Mr. Bentley's analysis lies in the emphasis upon structure. In the one-act plays that began with *Four Plays for Dancers*, Yeats did his most serious thinking about the contribution that form—the way in which drama moves to its resolution—makes to the theater. These plays are organically whole; they say what the theme demands must be said; and then they conclude. They do not ramble in the

1. Eric Bentley, "Yeats as a Playwright," *The Permanence of Yeats*, eds. James Hall and Martin Steinmann (New York, 1950), p. 238.

2. H. S. Krans, *William Butler Yeats and the Irish Literary Revival* (London, 1915), p. 132.

byroads of Irish eloquence. They benefit from the tight, coherent shaping that Yeats has provided. All this is worth saying. But structure is only one element of a play, and it is at least controversial whether firm structure is intrinsic to the success of a dramatic work.

The real issue rests with the dramatic qualities of the plays. Do they contribute to modern drama more than the historical curiosity (the plays of the man who directed the Abbey Theatre)? Are they more than the by-product of a brilliant career (the plays of a poet who, only incidentally, wrote for the theater)? Are they more than the dramatic meditations that Bentley admires? In short, are they truly plays?

Great drama deals with conflict, and its universal implications arise from the specific actions of characters who are confronted by specific situations. A dramatist courageous enough to have convictions cannot afford to talk *about* them. The *dramatis personae* who populate his mind must be significantly involved in the moments of time that he chooses for them. The measure of their significant involvement is the appeal that the dramatist simultaneously makes to his audience's sense of conduct and sense of beauty (Matthew Arnold's phrase comes inevitably to mind).

Yeats wrote many plays, and kept rewriting them to the end of his life. They are uneven in quality and in the popularity that they achieved. Some are overwritten (*The Shadowy Waters*); some succeed through understatement (*The Words Upon the Window-Pane*). But none of them deal with unworthy themes. They are never afraid of the challenge that great concepts present. They are all big enough to appeal to our sense of conduct and to our sense of beauty. And herein lies the signal contribution of Yeats.

It is misleading to argue, as one critic does, that all Yeats's plays are a quest for Beauty, "Beauty like a tightened bow," and that "all have the quality of dream rather than reality of everyday."³ Yeats used the truths of everyday life no less often than the visions of the imagination to communicate his feeling for the wonder, the excitement, inherent in his themes.

Lionel Johnson believed that Yeats "wrote for the stage rather from a desire to have his verses spoken than from a strong bent for the drama."⁴ Richard Ellmann's position, however, is more moderate, and more convincing on that account. Yeats, according to Ellmann, equivocated between formal and realistic drama in the earlier plays, and did too much theorizing in his middle period.

. . . In spite of his principle of common language and common passion, his personages are close to arrangements and abstractions and even in tragic circumstances do not assume altogether human life. Something seems to be wrong with their breathing; they suffer,

3. Andrew E. Malone, *The Irish Drama* (London, 1929), p. 131.

4. Kraus, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

especially in Deirdre, from an overdose of royal blood, and in the other plays also they are too often lopsided. Yeats had come close to a tragedy of humours, how close the list of characters in an early draft of *The Player Queen* shows. . . .⁵

Ellmann adds that the use of masks enabled Yeats "to achieve enough distance from life so that his characters would not demand so pressingly as in the Irish legends to be entirely human."

The thesis presented in this essay, therefore, is not that the plays are realistic, but rather that they are dramatic, and more often than has been realized, dramatic in the best sense. Sean O'Casey has argued for many years that Yeats is an underestimated dramatist. Indeed, it seems fair to describe Yeats as both dreamer and realist, simultaneously the poet who moves toward the vision forever to be denied his possession and the dramatist who knows the value of populating his imaginary garden with real toads.

Yeats knew that he might be misunderstood. To his father he wrote, on September 12, 1914, that abstract ideas were "one's curse," and that "one has sometimes to work for months before they are eliminated, or till the map has become a country. Yet, in some curious way, they are connected with poetry or rather with passion, one half its life and yet its enemy."⁶ He was talking about *The Player Queen*, a "wild comedy, almost a farce," that he wanted to play against a "tragic background." It was not an easy problem for him to settle. Moreover, the peculiar conditions of Irish playgoing exacerbated it. The coarse, pithy remarks that prevented *The Unicorn from the Stars* from turning into uncontrolled rhetoric were deliberately added as ballast. He firmly anchored in colloquial speech the séance of *The Words Upon the Window-Pane*. After all, it was he who had invented the phrase "Celtic twilight," and long before he met Ezra Pound he had become aware of its dangers. He quarreled with Moore over the notion that Cathleen ni Houlihan had to walk up and down all the time in front of the footlights. He opposed "superficial excitement." Drama for him did not consist "in a tension of wills excited by commonplace impulses, especially by those impulses that are the driving force of rather common nature," that is, "the will of a successful business man, the business will."⁷ Yeats sought Beauty; but he tried to achieve it for a reasonable cost, and to keep the rough vitality of characters who were dramatically enmeshed in significant moments of time. At his best, he struck a balance. He wanted to say more about life than the conventional play about the business will could say. He knew that the stage manager of his time could do nothing with Lear upon his heath; but it was necessary to know what Lear stood for. In a letter to the *Daily Chronicle*,

5. Richard Ellmann, *Yeats: The Man and the Masks* (New York, 1948), p. 183.

6. William Butler Yeats, *Letters*, ed. Allan Wade (London, 1954), p. 588.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 441.

January 27, 1899, Yeats enunciated a position that he never forsook:

The accepted theory is that men of letters have suddenly lost the dramatic faculty, but it is easier to believe that times and seasons change than that imagination and intellect change; for imagination and intellect are that which is eternal in man crying out against that which is temporal and perishing. The literature and painting of our time, when they come out of a deep life, are labouring to awaken again our interests in the moral and spiritual realities which were once the foundation of the arts; and the theatre, if it would cease to be but the amusement of idleness, must cast off that interest in external and accidental things which has marred all modern arts, and dramatic art more than any.⁸

His interest lay in moral and spiritual realities, and whether he wrote about the inner imagination, the self in opposition to the anti-self, or the old Irish heroic sagas,⁹ he adopted the language that seemed best suited to the specific problem of life his characters confronted. Life without ideals, Yeats saw, was unsatisfactory; life with ideals frequently was impossible; and to express these views he became either bardic or colloquial, leaving to others the subject of the business will. Small wonder, then, that his critics became snarled by the question of how realistic his plays were; they mistook his objective.

The Countess Cathleen is significant partly because of the well-known religious and political controversy that it aroused; the disapproval of two clerics; the hasty, ill-considered remarks of Moore and Martyn. The troubles were noisy but short-lived. Of greater significance is the fact that it launched Yeats's dramatic career.¹⁰

The relationship between the fourteen-year-old boy Teigue and his father, Shemus Rua, provides a rich study of Irish psychology. The drama arises from the failure of Irishmen to act for the common good; they desire only to end the hunger that assails them, and they will sell their souls if necessary. (The mere fact that the play offended some Irishmen as "a hideous caricature of our people's mental and moral character" should indicate that it had pertainence to the problems of Irish life.) The man Shemus has endured great provocations. Before him stretches the prospect of living on sorrel, dock, and dandelion, until the mouths of his family become green. To his wife's statement that

8. *Ibid.*, p. 310.

9. Such is the tripartite division that Una Ellis-Fermor gives to Yeats's career. See *The Irish Dramatic Movement* (London, 1954). She rejects the last plays—*The Cat and the Moon*, *Resurrection*, *The Words Upon the Window-Pane*, and *Purgatory*—on the basis of date as not belonging to the renaissance of poetic drama and the early Irish Dramatic Movement.

10. Yeats had written an Arcadian play, *The Island of Statues* (1885), and *The Seeker* (1885), but he became seriously interested in the theater after two events. One was the meeting of Maud Gonne, for whom he began writing *The Countess Cathleen* in 1889, and for whom he wrote more than one prose version. The other was a visit to a small club house at Bedford Park, London, where he witnessed the performance of a verse play by John Todhunter. Florence Farr, who acted in it, seemed a likely producer for plays that Yeats planned to write.

Yeats's next play after *The Countess Cathleen* was *The Land of Heart's Desire* (1894). Its tag was William Blake's line, "O Rose, thou art sick." Yeats intended it to be an anti-naturalistic document. He had seen at the Theatre d'Art of Paul Fort (in Paris) a production of Shelley's *The Cenci*, and he was also excited by the Symbolist values of *Axel*, by Villiers de l'Isle Adam. He wrote several versions of *The Land of Heart's Desire*, yet never was satisfied by the end result. Oddly enough, it is more often produced by amateur groups than any other work by Yeats.

God will cater for them still, he can only counter with the brooding memory of the five houses into which he looked: they all contained dead bodies. His bitterness against the rich extends to the Countess Cathleen, even before he knows her attitude toward the poverty of the peasant or what it is she proposes to do in order to alleviate her people's pain. To him the music of Aleel seems frivolous and heartless. In his mutter,

I have said nothing, lady.

Why should the like of us complain?

he reveals himself. He feels he suffers a great wrong, as indeed he does. But, childlike, he goes further. He believes that the famine has been directed against him personally. He refuses to thank the Countess for her seven halfpence and a silver bit. The gift is inadequate because he mistakes the spirit of the giving. To say—as Shemus does to Teigue—that money is almost useless with prices as high as they are, is to rationalize churlishness. The next step is to call in the devils.

But he is deeply human too. The Countess Cathleen understands the reasons for his misanthropy, his growing despair. They are human reasons. When he strikes his wife, who objects to calling devils from the wood, he means to show her "who's master."

So you'd stand up against me, and you'd say
Who or what I am to welcome here.

Far more than her "clatter," however, the dearth or famine has exasperated him. Ever he wants to justify himself. Speaking flippantly about the soul which has now grown "a marketable thing" (Scene II), he tries to convince himself that he has acted wisely. Nevertheless, age has brought him only suffering and temptation, and when we see him for the last time (Scene V), his corruption is complete. He ridicules his wife:

There's nobody could put into her head
That death is the worst thing can happen us,
Though that sounds simple, for her tongue grew rank
With all the lies that she had heard in chapel.

He urges his son to draw to the curtain, and to shut her out of the sight of her neighbors.

Teigue, who acts in concert with his embittered father, is quick-witted, unprincipled, sarcastic. He has no sense of pity for his mother, who sees clearly the duty she owes to God; no awareness of the nobility of the character of the Countess Cathleen; no comprehension of the irreparable nature of the transaction into which he has entered. He lives in the jungle of his own amorality, a wild beast of selfishness.

While he lays the turf beside the hearth, he ignores his mother's questions: "What can have made the grey hen flutter so?" "What can

the hen have heard?" "What can have kept your father all this while?" His concern is with the woman at Tubber-Vanach who

met a man with ears spread out,
And they moved up and down like a bat's wing.

Spiritual integrity is less important than the money he can make. His wickedness comes from a loss of faith. Teigue quotes his father,

What is the good of praying? father says,
and adds,

God and the Mother of God have dropped asleep.

When Shemus, an unsuccessful beggar, has been driven away as a competitor by other beggars, his son comments sourly, "Then you have brought no dinner." Shemes curses the beggars; Teigue adds, "And the last penny gone."

Standards deteriorate. The son becomes more extreme than the father. Shemus, after all, retains some dignity. The Countess Cathleen gives what she can from her purse, and he remarks.

It is a long while
Since I've set eyes on bread or on what buys it.
But Teigue's request is direct and arrogant:

Beautiful lady, give me something too;
I fell but now, being weak with hunger and thirst,
And lay upon the threshold like a log.

Shemus is more suspicious of the devils than Teigue. The latter not only urges his father to call them in, but rejoices when the Eastern merchants offer to buy souls. "I'll barter mine," Teigue says; "why should we starve for what may be but nothing?" Shemus cries that God has given nothing but famine, and that Satan at least gives money. One pities Shemus for having been driven so far. Teigue, however, blasphemes: "Yet no thunder stirs." He wants Shemus to enter into the unholy bargain. He is willing to cry aloud at every crossroad that the merchants will buy the souls of men for a good price. When Shemus hesitates to pick up the money which the Second Merchant has sneeringly thrown down before them, he picks it up without a qualm. His is continual heresy: he laughs as he speaks to the Countess Cathleen of the two gentlemen who buy men's souls. To the exclamation of the Countess, "O God!" he replies, "And maybe there's no soul at all."

Not until the end of the play do the figures of Shemus and Teigue blur, with Shemus trying to persuade the peasants to sell themselves, Teigue sneering at his mother for refusing to buy bread bought with the money of the merchants, and both of them dragging Aleel away.

For four scenes they have been presented as dramatic contrasts, clearly drawn.

Mary, wife of Shemus Rua, entreats her husband and son, who will not listen to her. She is kind to the Countess Cathleen, who has lost her way in the woods. Honest, pious, gracious, she reminds Shemus that he did not thank her ladyship for the gift, nor is she put off by his sharp retort. She knows that the Countess Cathleen could do no more.

We have all she had;

She emptied out the purse before our eyes.

She immediately recognizes the diabolism of the merchants. She refuses to cook for them; urges them, if they be not demons, to give food or money to the starving poor; never confesses to fear in the presence of Satan's representatives; and tells them (after Shemus and Teigue have sold their souls) their certain future:

Destroyers of souls, God will destroy you quickly.
You shall at last dry like dry leaves and hang
Nailed like dead vermin to the doors of God.

No matter what they say, she knows that God is all-powerful. She stands for the same kind of incorruptibility that calls the Countess Cathleen to Heaven.

Yeats further characterizes the peasants who appear in Scenes IV and V. They are troubled people, urged beyond what they conceive to be their limits of endurance, as they bargain with the merchants. They are not sentimentalized. John Maher turns out to be

a man of substance, with dull mind,
And quiet senses and unventurous heart.
The angels think him safe.

When he attempts to haggle with the merchants, the flaw in his character stands revealed:

Often at night
He is wakeful from a dread of growing poor,
And thereon wonders if there's any man
That he could rob in safety.

The peasants come to the merchants for various reasons: for money, for fear of the grave, desiring to imitate their neighbors, out of joy at last the decision has been taken and all hope may be cast away. Within a remarkably short space, Yeats indicates the complexity of their motives for being what they are.

Even so, this is not a realistic play, for all its closeness of observation in both character and idiom. Yeats's concern is with the moral and spiritual realities, and realism subserves these themes here, as elsewhere in his dramas. He is describing a tragedy: the tragedy of peasants who

will not live by the light of the intense flame of conviction that warms the heart of their benefactress. Aleel, the poet, cannot persuade the Countess Cathleen to fly from her castle out of the woods. His impassioned speech (Scene III), in which he declares that the lady he loves must live in the hills "among the sounds of music and the light / Of waters, till the evil days are done," is poignant with lost hope; he, like the peasant, is unable to share in her vision.

Yet the tragedy is not complete. Not for a moment do playgoers believe that the Countess Cathleen is mistaken, or that her love will be wasted. She refuses Aleel because she will not listen to him pluck the harp while the night hunts the foolish sun away with "stillness and pale tapers." After the demons have stolen her gold, the old peasant's lamentation that God has forsaken the Irish people is met with gentle firmness by the Countess:

Old man, old man, He never closed a door
Unless one opened.

She retains her faith. God, as she understands Him, models in the clay and molds there His image. To create beauty is difficult in a world that knows the demon; even the hand of God may slip, and demon hordes may be born. Nevertheless, faith must triumph over the worst that both life and the demons have to present. The last words spoken by Cathleen in Scene III are an invocation to her good neighbors to pray for all men and women mad from famine. The peasants kneel, and the Countess Cathleen cries in a loud voice,

Mary, Queen of angels,
And all you clouds on clouds of saints, farewell!

At that moment she renounces spiritual salvation for the sake of humanity.

Such a soul is worth a great price to the merchants. They willingly pay the five hundred thousand crowns which she demands, a sum which will feed her people "till the dearth go by." All recognize the importance of her sacrifice. A peasant cries that his soul is less than the value of the Countess's soul:

O! What would Heaven do without you, lady?

Another peasant speaks of the way in which the claws of the merchants clutch within their leathern gloves. In honor of her sacrifice, the Second Merchant offers her for the signing of the damnable contract a quill made of a feather growing on the cock when Peter dared deny his Master: "And all who use it have great honour in Hell." Aleel, who has attempted to prevent her from signing, is awed by her renunciation. Nor has she much longer to live. The First Merchant has heard "the brazen door of Hell" moving on its hinges, and "the eternal revelry"

drifts out to hearten him. Oona, the foster-mother, sees the tears which fill Cathleen's eyes, and prays to God to guard the Countess's soul; even offers, if a soul must needs be lost, her own soul. The peasants cry a chorus of the saved. Theirs is testament that they no longer think of themselves; they have understood the nature of the sacrifice. One peasant woman wants to know whether the Countess Cathleen will give, through Oona, enough to keep her children alive during the famine. Significantly, however, she worries for her children, not herself. Another peasant woman draws the issue:

O Queen of Heaven, and all you blessed saints,
Let us and ours be lost so she be shriven.

The death of Cathleen overwhelms everyone with grief. Oona's scream, the peasant's remark that "she was the great white lily of the world," another peasant's remark that "she was more beautiful than the pale stars," Aleel's curses at "Time and Fate and Change," the old man's apology that they have all been weak, that God now speaks in anger, sum up a transformation. *Ideals which are lived by, loved, and sacrificed for, will resurrect the race.*

Hence, Aleel's despair is unjustified. The devil may contemplate only the deed, but God "looks always on the motive, not the deed." Oona has the last speech of the play. Her last desire is to die and go to her she loves. From the heart of the light there emanates a sound of distant horns. As the vision melts away, the spectators in the theater behold only the faint forms of kneeling peasants.

Such a play makes its own way in the theater, because it succeeds as drama, delineates character in economical and telling fashion, and treats a theme of magnitude. It satisfies both the imagination and the intellect, which, in Yeats's phrase, cry out against the temporal and perishing. It deals with meaningful human existence.

As a dramatist, much more often than not, Yeats succeeded in precisely these ways. He gave to the dramatic arts probably a greater amount of time than he did to the writing of poetry. His plays are more than matrices for the poems. Someday Yeats's theatrical achievement will be revalued: over two dozen plays of genuine distinction, witty, realistic, and stylized, plays that are surprisingly actable.

The Countess Cathleen, first of Yeats's serious plays, is enough to make one catch his breath in admiration; and it is not necessarily Yeats's best play.

HAROLD OREL

CHARACTER AS DESTINY IN HOFMANNSTHAL'S *ELECTRA*

AS AN ARTIST HUGO VON HOFMANNSTHAL was always violent in his reaction against materialism in philosophy and naturalism in art. Even as a young man, living in the morally debilitated pre-World War I city of Vienna, Hofmannsthal saw the limitations of an art which was committed to an external view of reality. Naturalism in the drama, with its convention of environmental credibility, from the time of Hebbel, Becque, Hauptmann, and Ibsen (up to *The Wild Duck*) had tended to show life as it existed on the surface; it was all too often sociological in its orientation and failed to capture the multiple complexities of man's inner life. It was because of this very ordinariness, this exaction of truth to life, that Hofmannsthal turned to Symbolism, the shrine of all the disenchanted young poets and dramatists of his time.

The symbolists' ideal at that time was a poetry of "Stimmung." Their poetry was often exotic and usually esoteric, but so long as it was inward and cultured, and avoided contamination with the rawness and crudities of the external social milieu of the time, it served the symbolists' purposes. Their aim was to recapture that musical intensity which is present to some degree in all art, but which was completely lost in the arid and sterile atmosphere of the sociological plays and novels. Walter Pater was the leading critic and spokesman of this movement in its rebellion against naturalism. His dictum about all the arts "aspiring towards the conditions of music" sprang from his sensitive diagnosis of the condition of art at that time, and it became the credo of many artists. Hofmannsthal was one of them. Like Strindberg, he was moved by the music of Debussy and influenced by the paintings of Gauguin and Van Gogh. In a similar way the symbolist poets, particularly Mallarmé, Valéry, and Stefan George influenced the young Viennese playwright. Hofmannsthal came to believe, under these influences, that human experience is so complex that words can never express and explain it; that life can only be approached obliquely by the indirect method of symbols. As a result, Hofmannsthal rejected most of Ibsen's drama as too exact and precise for symbols and sought in his own plays to achieve the lyrical suggestiveness of music.

Hofmannsthal's early lyric dramas fit very well into this atmosphere of "Stimmung." But all too often critics have mistakenly held that symbolism is the predominant characteristic of his drama and that his plays, therefore, are more lyrical than dramatic. This is a mistake,

for Hofmannsthal thought of the theater primarily in dramatic and not symbolical terms. By the turn of the century he had realized that although symbols could be used to heighten and deepen the implications of naturalistic drama, they also led to an ambiguity, an abstractness, and an allusiveness which the theater could not control and express. In this connection one is reminded of Hedwig's word to her mother at the end of the second act of *The Wild Duck*:

GINA: Wasn't that queer talk about wanting to be a dog?

HEDWIG: Do you know, mother, I believe he [Gregers] meant something quite different by that.

GINA: Why, what should he mean?

HEDWIG: Oh, I don't know; but it seemed to me he meant something different from what he said—all the time.

If what Hedwig says is true, if everything that is explicit really means something else, then the drama either loses touch with reality or it becomes so diffuse that it can communicate only in a private and personal way rather than in the communal way that the theater requires.

It is for this reason, despite his lyrical tendencies and the fact that he was strongly influenced by the symbolist ideals of verse, that Hofmannsthal ultimately broke with many writers of his generation who included a social art like the theater in the world they rejected. After *Death and the Fool* (1893), in which he repudiates the aestheticism of the symbolists, Hofmannsthal's work is a continuing effort to achieve a theatrical form which would combine the symbolists' rich and colorful language with an action that was dramatically rather than lyrically conceived.

In his quest for a new dramatic form Hofmannsthal was never attracted to naturalism. In fact, in his *Book of Friends*, a collection of aphorisms from his notebooks, he defined the weakness of naturalistic writers with great clarity. "Naturalism distorts Nature because by copying the surface it has to neglect the the wealth of inner relatedness—Nature's real mysterium." Hofmannsthal more fully describes his attitude toward objective reality as it affects the theater in a brief essay entitled "The Theater as Illusion." The principal thought expounded in this essay is not that the external world is "unreal" in any Platonic sense, but that it is, while real enough, too insipid, too uninspiring, too barren to be portrayed on the stage.

This attitude toward the theater had already been strongly advanced by Strindberg. The Swedish dramatist, in advocating "sensational naturalism," believed the playwright should dramatize those moments of greatest crisis and tumult in people's lives in order to see how such people really acted. In his Preface to *Miss Julie*, Strindberg writes: "Misunderstood naturalism believed that art consists in reproducing a piece of nature in a natural way. But, the greater naturalism seeks

out the points where great battles take place." By using only the moments of "crisis" in the lives of his characters as his dramatic material, Strindberg's naturalistic plays were filled with sensational episodes. But this is a sensationalism of convention. Certainly, Strindberg and Hofmannsthal would be the first to admit that all the events which take place in *The Father* or *Electra* could never occur in the twenty-four hour period covered in each play. It is by packing in these events that the playwright is able to show that "inner relatedness" which is "Nature's real mysterium." Both Strindberg and Hofmannsthal were more concerned with those mysterious forces which drive people, even to destruction, than they were with the events that these people experienced. The result is a drama of great concentration and apparent horror. But how else can the horror of dislocated people be shown? There may be other ways, certainly Chekhov used different but equally effective techniques, but none has had a greater effect on the modern theater than the technique of Strindberg and Hofmannsthal. Their influence is due to the fact that they expressed a reality which could not be denied.

With this concept of theater in general, Hofmannsthal, of necessity, manifests very definite views concerning the function of character in his drama. An understanding of this conception of character will help to untangle the complicated and tortured people of his first mature and probably finest play, *Electra*. In an essay written in the form of a conversation, entitled "On Characters in Novels and Plays" (1902), Hofmannsthal discussed the kind of characters he believed belonged in the drama. Since this essay was written shortly before he began the writing of *Electra* it provides many valuable insights to how we should understand the complex characters in that play. Some excerpts:

B. Characters in the theater are nothing but contrapuntal necessities. The stage character is a contraction of the real one . . . I don't see people, I see destinies. The power of the erotic for him who is the slave of love. The power of weakness for the weak. The power of glory for the ambitious. No, not just love, just weakness, just glory; but the love by which man is enslaved, his individual weakness, his specific glory.

H. What! You want to set such narrow, such sad limits to your genius? The atmosphere of existences consuming themselves pathologically, the hideous, blind, devouring mania—are these the sinister and constricted subjects you want to choose instead of plunging into the colorful variety of human life.

B. I don't know what you call "pathological"; but I know that every human existence worthy of presentation consumes itself, and that to maintain this flame it absorbs out of the whole world nothing but the elements expedient to its burning. Yes, the world which I've fetched forth from my brain is peopled with madmen. . . . My creatures are obsessed by their fixed ideas, are incapable of seeing

anything in the world which they themselves do not project into it with their feverish eyes. But they are so, because they are human. For them experiences do not exist, because there is no such thing as experience; because the inner core of man is a fire consuming itself.

From this passage it is clear that Hofmannsthal conceived of character in drama as a complex of conflicting and contrapuntal foils which will reveal, in the midst of life's greatest catastrophe, what its destiny, over and above the actions of the here and now, really is. Since Hofmannsthal was concerned with showing those passionate powers which are the greatest realities in human beings, he had to conceive a dramatic context in which his characters and their actions could collide in such a way as to reflect or express that power which motivates both the character and the action.

Thus, the function of the theater, Hofmannsthal believed, is to show that sublime and true moment in a man's life when the motivating passion-power of his existence is expressed. To Hofmannsthal this moment is more real than any external reality. To many critics, including the imaginary critic in Hofmannsthal's "Conversation," this necessitates creating characters who appear to be pathological cases. The playwright agrees; for he knows that in life, although the process may be slower and less apparent, man is ultimately destroyed by that very passion which gives him the power to live. It is that moment when man's motivating passion-power drives him to the conflict of life and death that must be captured in the drama.

When viewed in this way we see that Hofmannsthal's *Electra* is more than a depraved and wild beast. In the conflict of what she says and what she does, the playwright is able to present that which is most real in *Electra*: her Destiny. He dramatizes that consuming and passionate power of vengeance which destroys every attribute of *Electra's* womanhood, and, as the play ends, kills not only Aegisthus and Clytemnestra, but herself as well. We may complain that she is a mad woman, but she is real; and if, Hofmannsthal seems to say, we could each know our own reality, we too would be thought of as mad. Hofmannsthal's plays may be filled with demons, but they are demons who reveal, at the moment they are consumed, man's destiny.

It is this sensational quality inherent in Hofmannsthal's conception of character together with the impact made on him by modern painting, especially the works of Van Gogh, which accounts for the stark theatricality of his work. Upon reading *Electra*, one discovers that Hofmannsthal has endowed each element of the dramatic production with rich and contrasting colors. Hofmannsthal helps us here, for not only has he given explicit stage directions, but he also published a fuller account of his ideas concerning the play's production in a short essay

published at the printing of the play. In the beginning of this essay entitled "Szenische Verschriften Elektra," we find the following injunction:

Shun any suggestion of Hellenic architecture! This avoidance of classic Greek symmetry in theater design is then carried over and consistently applied to all the other stage properties, props, costumes, even affecting the attitude and behavior of the characters themselves. In place of the Attic peninsula, the stage represents an Oriental potentate's back courtyard, where are located the hovels that house the slaves. One senses that within the enclosure an atmosphere of bleak despair prevails. It is like a cage with no possibility of flight.

Hofmannsthal is equally exact in his expressionistic description of the lighting. It is planned in such a way as to contrast the two predominant tones of the play: the black of the House of Atreus and the red of the blood which has flowed in the past and will flow again. Electra "comes out of the house. She is alone with the red flickerings of light which fall through the branches of the fig trees and drop like blood stains on the ground and on the dark walls." The color of the light is used to symbolize the density of the play's central character. It is like a Wagnerian motif; large patches of crimson are immediately associated with Electra; they grow more intense and actually glow when she makes her initial entrance and begins her monologue.

As the sun disappears from the horizon, Electra and her sister are in the shades of dusk. The pall-like quality of their existence is thus expressed and it becomes increasingly more painful as torch-lights within the palace shine out through the barred windows, casting flickering striped shadows across the girls' prison.

As Clytemnestra enters, in a procession of a thousand lights, we are not only aware of Clytemnestra's great need of light, but we are even more conscious of the great darkness that surrounds Electra. Clytemnestra, the queen with phantasmagoric nightmares, cannot stand the dark and, as Electra gradually forces her into a living nightmare the lights disappear until "only a faint light falls from inside the house across the inner court, and casts bars of shadow over the figures of the two women." This is the only link to Clytemnestra's protective yet destructive palace.

The powerful *agon* between Clytemnestra and Electra is played in the eerie shadows of this light. Just as Clytemnestra is about to go insane and that light is flickering out, she is saved and her first reaction is to call for "Lights!" Then:

Serving women with torches come out and station themselves behind Clytemnestra. She beckons more lights! More come out and station themselves behind her, so that the court is full of light,

and a red-gold glare floods the walls. Now the features of Clytemnestra slowly change, and their shuddering tension relaxes in an evil triumph. She lets the message be whispered to her again, without taking her eyes off Electra. Then the Waiting Woman lifts her staff, and, leaning on both, hurriedly, eagerly, catching up her robe from the step, she runs into the house. The servant women with lights follow her, as if pursued.

Electra is left in a "Cimmerian gloom," a portentous darkness.

Electra remains in this gloom until the revenge is completed. When all the women run out into the court with their bright torches, Electra begins her dance of death in this light of flickering red and gold. The lights symbolize not only the triumph of Electra's vengeance, but in their burning heat they are expressive of that consuming fire within Electra which destroys her at the moment of victory.

Hofmannsthal describes the costumes with the same care. Electra and the slave women are miserably clad in the threadbare rags of the most menial slave. Clytemnestra wears a scarlet dress. Here is not the Queen of Argos, but a barbaric ruler from some oriental past. She is "bedecked all over with precious stones and talismans. Her arms are covered by bracelets, her fingers glitter with rings." She leans on an ivory staff encrusted with precious stones. Her two ladies-in-waiting are no less striking in this procession of exotic grandeur. The one is dressed in dark violet; and the other, like a snake of the Nile, is clad in yellow, her hair pulled back in Egyptian style. As Hofmannsthal tells us: "These three women must be taken as a unit, a brilliant antithesis to the impoverished-appearing Princess."

The playwright has conceived of the play in theatrical terms. Coming as he did at the beginning of the Twentieth Century Hofmannsthal was faced with the problem of how to express and communicate his feelings about human destiny in a fragmented theater. His answer was two-fold: to return to Greek mythology in an attempt to find a universal situation (a method so often used in contemporary French drama); and to seek a theatrical unity by blending all of the elements of stage production into his dramatic conception. It is here that we see Van Gogh's profound effect upon Hofmannsthal; not only visually, but structurally as well. We see in the *Electra* the intensity and contrast (the use of bright colors, particularly red and yellow, sharply contrasted with black) which characterizes Van Gogh's painting. Hofmannsthal intends his play to be lighted and costumed in a very definite way and without these effects his play will suffer greatly.

To some literary purists this is the failure of the play; for it does not stand on its own feet. Hofmannsthal would admit that his drama needs the stage directions, but he would insist that only a total theatrical production can bring that unity of expression which, as Wagner advo-

cated before him, the dramatist needs if he is to communicate in any meaningful way to his audience.

In short, Hofmannsthal's theatrical sense is an essential element of his drama; he has made everything count: color, lighting, props, costuming. The very physical appearance of the characters is so deeply symbolic that every feature, each trait, the slightest gesture has its meaning, its relationship to all the other traits, features, and gestures. Nothing is wasted here; everything is utilized with the utmost economy, to heighten an effect here or diminish a detail there. Deliberately departing from the spirit of classical antiquity, the poet has in his profound attention to detail created so perfect and flawless a stage effect to harmonize with the characters and the plot that a definite harmony and unity almost in the Hellenic sense are the result.

A fuller understanding of how all of these elements of Hofmannsthal's dramaturgy are fused can best be demonstrated by a more detailed analysis of the play. The opening scene of the play is one of indirect exposition. The setting is the courtyard of the palace, but it is suggestive of a cage for wild animals. From the slave-women we discover that this is the dwelling place of Electra and that her behavior is much like that of a wild cat. She "howls" nightly for her father and when we see her for the first time her actions are those of an animal. From the very beginning Hofmannsthal's heroine is presented as a pathological case. Electra is left alone; but her loneliness is of a different kind than that found in Greek dramatizations of the myth. In her passion for a bloody revenge she is beyond the pale of human relationships. A wild animal cannot exist with people in society. Unlike Sophocles' Electra, who is alone because she stands for a course of action which demands more than anyone else is capable of giving; unlike a Euripidean heroine, who is alone because she is not accepted, Hofmannsthal's Electra is alone because her driving destiny for vengeance has destroyed all her humanity and the society which surrounds her cannot tolerate her.

Her monologue is a primitive ritual. This ceremonial invocation of her father occurs daily. We are reminded of those primitive savages who attempt to control reality by ritualistic means. She goes into her trance and the ghost of Agamemnon returns. The significance of the first part of the monologue is two-fold. Not only does Electra believe that she can control reality ritualistically, but as she calls for the bloody death of all those associated with the murderers in addition to Aegisthus and Clytemnestra, we become aware that vengeance has taken such a hold on Electra that it is more real than she. It is not the revenge of a murdered father, but an all-consuming vengeance which includes everyone. The whole household is to be sacrificed so Agamemnon may resume his regal role in the other world.

The ceremony is about to end, and like the close of all primitive rites,

the clairvoyant Electra breaks into a dance of death. She sees herself, Chrysothemis, and Orestes joyfully dancing in the bloody haze that exudes from the many corpses. Their horrible victory dance ironically prefigures her own dance of death.

Her sister enters calling for her. Chrysothemis' reaction is one of fear; Electra has become a wild animal even to her own family. Hofmannsthal's intention is greatly different than that of his Greek predecessors. Chrysothemis is not the weak-kneed sister; she sees that Electra has destroyed herself and would destroy all others about her because of something which has only dubious value. We learn in this scene that Hofmannsthal is not primarily interested in justice; he is showing what happens to people whose destiny is revenge. Agamemnon's death and the need for revenge of that death has long since been forgotten except as the excuse which feeds Electra's revengeful spirit.

Chrysothemis has discovered the plot to imprison Electra and has come to warn her sister. In Electra's reply we learn why Hofmannsthal has introduced the warning. It is not to heighten our sympathy for Electra, nor is it to prompt Electra to action. In her rejection of Chrysothemis, she states her own position:

Do not prowl about.
Sit on the ground, like me, and wish for death.
And judgment upon her and upon him.

These lines are remarkable for they could only be spoken by someone in the witch-doctor era of humanity's evolution. The dramatist has shown here an amazing familiarity with primitive thought and practice, for what most characterizes the savage mind is its unshakeable conviction that it can impose changes and modify phenomena in the concrete world through the exercise of will and the practice of magic ritual (mimicry). That this is what Hofmannsthal intended is made incontrovertible when Electra learns that Clytemnestra has had a horrible nightmare that Orestes had come and strangled her. Electra shouts:

It is I,
I, that have sent him to her. From my breast
I sent the dream to her.

As Electra goes on, trance-like, describing the ghastly dream that she has envisioned, it is realized with the entrance of Clytemnestra. With this entrance Hofmannsthal has pulled all of the theatrical stops: the colorful procession, the torches, the slashing whips, and the muffled cries of the slaves. He has used every theatrical technique available in order to create a peak of emotional tension which will control the mother-daughter scene.

Clytemnestra's opening speech shows in another way how different

Hofmannsthal's intentions are from those of his Greek predecessors. When Clytemnestra says:

What do you want? See it now, how it rears
Its swollen neck and darts its tongue at me!
See what I have let loose in my own house.
If she could only kill me with her eyes!

We see that Hofmannsthal has transferred the snake image of the Greek versions from Orestes to Electra, and as Electra writhes in the courtyard it becomes clear that the dream image has been given human embodiment. It is more evidence that Hofmannsthal was intent upon showing the animal destiny of his heroine who is consumed with the fire of revenge.

The witch-doctor quality of Electra's character is further emphasized by the mystical cure which Clytemnestra seeks, and which Electra offers. The importance of this scene is once again to contrast Hofmannsthal's dramatic conception with that of his predecessors. In all of the Greek versions of the theme great pains are taken to show the similarity between Electra and her mother; that Electra, too, is capable of taking justice into her own hands and thus bring upon herself the same guilt and fear as that suffered by her mother. The purpose of this scene, the longest of the play, is also to show the similarity of the daughter to her mother; but it is a similarity of an entirely different nature. In terms of their outward actions and language the two women are different. They are alike in that they are driven to destruction by a great passion that is their destiny. Just as Electra's humanity is destroyed by her passion for vengeance, so too has Clytemnestra, who is described as a walking corpse, been destroyed by her all-consuming guilt and fear. Hofmannsthal has realized his idea of character as destiny most clearly in this scene of paradoxically contrasting similarity.

As the scene develops, Electra's destiny is seen to be the stronger of the two. With speeches of great rhetorical lyricism, Electra literally forces her mother up against the wall and is moving in, like the wild animal she has become, for the kill, when a messenger comes out to tell of Orestes' feigned death. Clytemnestra is saved, for the moment, and in her salvation Hofmannsthal foreshadows the tragic irony of the play's conclusion. Electra's destiny will overcome that of her mother, as it has in this scene, but Electra will be deprived then as she is now, of joining in the final kill.

The next scene moves rapidly. The almost comic banter of the cook and the two servants is a much needed lessening of the tension which Hofmannsthal has created. Its purpose, however, is not totally comic, since even in their banter these servants give us another view of those conditions which have helped to mould Electra's destiny.

The following scene between Chrysothemis and Electra is the second

crucial scene in the play. Electra, determined to do the murder alone now that she believes Orestes is dead, asks her sister to help her. She is refused. The purpose of the scene is not to contrast Electra heroically determined to act for what she believes is more important than living, with Chrysothemis pathetically clinging to life at all costs (as in Sophocles). Rather Hofmannsthal uses it to show the effects of destiny upon Electra as it consumes her; this is best achieved by contrasting Electra with a girl who is not a coward, but who is repulsed by an existence which has no other aim than a constant brooding for revenge.

As the destiny of revenge consumes Electra it destroys her as a woman. Her attitude toward sex is distorted by her continuing belief that her mother's relationship with Aegisthus is adulterous. As a result all normal sexuality is obscene and guilt-ridden. Yet her denial of sex as the result of this aversion has caused her to be obsessed with it. Her language is highly charged with sexual images and all that she does has a sexual referent. The effect of this sexual denial, combined with her perverted and obsessive attitude toward love, has been to create in her marked lesbian tendencies which become overt in this scene:

You! For you are strong. (Close to her.)
How strong you are! To you
Have virgin nights given strength. How lithe and slim
Your loins are. You can slip through every cranny,
Creep through the window. Let me feel your arms;
How cool and strong they are! What arms they are
I feel when thus you thrust me back with them.
Could you not stifle one with their embrace?
Could you not clasp one to your cool firm breast
With both your arms until one suffocated?
There is such strength about you everywhere.
It streams like cool close water from a rock,
It flows in a great flood with all your hair
Down your strong shoulders.

Hofmannsthal, a master in his use of primitive psychological phenomena, creates here a scene which vividly shows us how completely his heroine has been destroyed as a woman by her passion for vengeance.

Chrysothemis, as we have pointed out, cannot accept Electra's endless cries for vengeance. She is aware, as the Sophoclean counterpart is not, that the destiny of revenge has had a dehumanizing effect upon her sister and she cannot accept it for herself. Chrysothemis is motivated by more normal human instincts, she desires marriage and the pleasures and fruits of such a union. She has the capacity to care and feel for others (most clearly seen, in contrast to her sister, in her reaction to the report of Orestes' death) and must reject that destiny which withers all human feelings. But Hofmannsthal is not asking us to sympathize with Chrysothemis, attractive as she is. Hofmannsthal's inten-

tion is to show the reality of Electra's destiny and the destructive effects that it has on her humanity. The function of Chrysothemis in this scene is to put into sharper focus the dehumanizing process which is taking place in Electra's character.

Left alone Electra plans to carry out the murders by herself. Like the wild animal which we know she is, she begins to dig in the earth, like a dog for a bone, for the battle-ax which had been used to murder her father. It is while she is digging for the means to achieve, almost ritualistically, the purification of the House of Atreus, that she is discovered by her brother. The recognition scene, although similar in construction to Sophocles', has lost much of its traditional importance. Hofmannsthal stresses three elements. First, he heightens Orestes' horror at what has happened to Electra over the years while he has been absent, in order to drive home with finality the process of dehumanization which has taken place in the heroine. Second, as Electra concludes her description of the horrors of being caged in the palace for years, she says: "Speak to me, speak! Why your whole body trembles." Orestes replies:

My body? Let it tremble. Do you not think
That he would tremble otherwise than this
Could he but guess the way I mean to send him?

The significance of this speech (hardly noticed by most critics) is to state explicitly Hofmannsthal's belief that one's physical being is separate from that force which drives human action. Third, Hofmannsthal makes it clear that the gods do not demand vengeance. This radical change in the tradition underscores the fact that there is no motivation for the revenge except that Electra must have revenge. We really do not know why Orestes has come and what motivates his acceptance of the duty to wreak vengeance on the slayers of his father. There is only an intentional vagueness. Since Hofmannsthal is concerned with showing the destiny of revenge in *Electra*, and not with the ethical problems which result from matricide and murder, revenge for the sake of revenge is motivation enough for the play's external action. It is only when we see the play as an expression of Hofmannsthal's concept of the reality of destiny that this apparent "motiveless malignancy" does not cause trouble in the interpretation of the play.

From this point on the play moves quickly to its conclusion. Orestes enters the house, and while he is preparing for the murders, Electra paces back and forth "before the door with bowed head, like a wild beast in its cage." Suddenly she remembers the battle-ax. This is the final irony of her destiny. In her excitement at seeing her brother she forgot to give him the ax. Both murders are successfully accomplished without a struggle. At the moment of Aegisthus' death there begins a gigantic demonstration in which the entire populace, Chrysothemis in-

cluded, participates. The echoing noise from the demonstrators swells into a mighty roar and the flickering beams cast by a thousand torches accompany this crescendo. In the midst of all the commotion one person appears motionless, unable to join the throng: Electra. Then with superhuman effort she rises and plunges into a weird, unrestrained dance. But Electra is no longer of this world; her mission on earth is fulfilled, and she no longer has a will to live. She whirls on and on until exhausted, she falls into a lifeless heap. The prophetic vow to her mother has been consummated.

This final moment, one of great theatrical power, is symbolic of Hofmannsthal's conception of the character of Electra. It is the dance that earlier in the play gave Electra ritual control over her hated captors; and yet, as the play ends, *she* is controlled by the dance to the point of death. The dance is symbolic of the victory of her destiny of vengeance; and yet it is her defeat. It is fulfillment which is empty. The dance, in its orgiastic quality, is symbolic of a kind of sexual realization, but the fruit of that realization is destruction. This is the "sublime and true moment" of Electra's life; this is the moment when her destiny, that passion and power which has sustained her through all the years of hardship, destroys her. Electra is that incendiary figure whose spark ignites Orestes to action. But the fire, like the dance, her chief weapons against her enemies, could only be turned in upon herself once they have done their work and her enemies are no more. Hofmannsthal realizes his intention that the drama "must capture that moment when man is destroyed by the very passion which gives him life!"

What is the tragedy? The more obvious answer is that Electra was engaged in a struggle that proved futile; Electra sacrificed all that she was as a human being for nothing. This futility is symbolized by the fact that Orestes succeeded without the aid of the battle-axe Electra had so carefully buried for this sacred moment. Electra failed to share even symbolically in the fulfillment of her life's dream. These ironies, however, are but symbols of the greater tragedy. The tragedy of Hofmannsthal's *Electra* is that men are destroyed by the very forces which give them life.

Hofmannsthal used the Electra theme in a new way. He was not concerned with justice, with self-realization and rebirth through suffering, nor with the helplessness of the human situation. He gave this traditional theme new life, by using it to express the tortured reality of human existence in a time when man could not live by any other means than by those passions which so moulded his life as to become its destructive destiny.

ROBERT W. CORRIGAN

THE ANTI-SPIRITUAL VICTORY IN THE THEATER OF IONESCO

THE FRENCH DRAMATISTS who began writing about 1950, baptized by M. Jean Duvignaud the "School of Paris," have sometimes been called "anti-theatrical," for they employ dramatic methods which are frequently opposed to those of the conventional theater. Writers like Ionesco, Beckett, and the early Adamov wish to return to what might be called "pure theater," that is to say a type of theater employing means which are strictly theatrical and do not belong to the realms of philosophy, psychology, sociology or politics. One of the favorite devices of such a theater is the presentation of the author's views in a visual way, using space and movement rather than language. In *Waiting for Godot*, for example, the moral suffering of mankind is depicted physically by shoes which do not fit, hats which scratch, servants visibly attached to masters, and watches which do not run. In a play like Adamov's *The Parody*, the solitude and bewilderment of modern man are represented by a decor (including a clock without hands) which remains the same, but is constantly foreign because seen from different angles. In *The Big and the Little Manoeuvre*, a man's destruction by incomprehensible and impersonal forces is made more palpable by his loss of one limb after the other.

The theater of Ionesco is rich in examples of this phenomenon. In the essays he has published in various French periodicals, Ionesco has described quite explicitly the feeling he is attempting to evoke by giving such undue importance to the physical aspects of his theater. There are two fundamental states of consciousness at the root of his plays, he tells us in "The Point of Departure" (*Cahier des Quatre Saisons*, August, 1955). One is that of evanescence, and the other that of heaviness or opacity. The latter feeling most often dominates, and we feel the universe crushing in upon us:

Matter fills everything, takes up all space, annihilates all liberty under its weight; the horizon shrinks, and the world becomes a stifling dungeon. Speech crumbles, but in another way, words fall like stones, like corpses; I feel myself overcome by heavy forces against which I wage a losing battle.

Such a "victory of anti-spiritual forces," of the dead *thing* over that which is alive, is expressed on many levels in the theater of Ionesco. Setting and properties, language, characters, and structure, each contributes in a slightly different way to the impression of heaviness or opacity.

The first and most obvious level, that of physical objects, plays a particularly large role in the later comedies. In the earlier plays, *The Bald Soprano* (1950?), *The Lesson* (1950), and *Jack or the Submission* (1950), the stage is encumbered not with an oppressive amount of matter, but with fantastic characters and what one might call solidified language. In *The Chairs* (1951) the characters are more realistic, the language less absurd, and the accumulation of objects as a means of expressing solitude, uselessness and loss of liberty makes its appearance. The Old Man and the Old Woman, living in a dilapidated apartment on a lonely island, await the arrival of their guests to whom the Man will reveal his "Message" before the two leap to their deaths. The guests arrive and a chair is brought for each. The guests are, however, invisible, and soon the stage is cluttered with chairs, suggesting that even when people are present there is an absence of humanity and an overabundance of the object. The physical universe and society, in the form of the chairs, gradually accumulate between the two old people so that at the end of the play, as they leap from their respective windows at either side of the stage, there is no opportunity for them to meet again. The last guest to arrive is "His Majesty," and in spite of strenuous efforts to reach him, neither of the characters is able to get through the mass of chairs. The setting of the play also suggests the futility of life, and a lack of meaning, for there are ten doors in this small apartment, and the characters go in and out all and any, aware that they all lead to the same place.

In *Victims of Duty* (1952) the crushing force of life, and of an inimical world, is manifested by a huge crust of bread which the Inspector forces Choubert to chew and swallow with great difficulty. At the same time, Choubert's wife is preparing coffee for her guest, and brings out dozens of teacups which she piles upon a buffet.

In *Amédée or How to Get Rid of It* (1953), the dead love of Amédée and Madeleine, their bitter and quarrelsome relationship, is represented by a cadaver which they discovered in their bedroom some fifteen years ago. It is stricken with "geometric progression," and has been growing ever since. Moreover large mushrooms have been sprouting in the bedroom where the fascinating body is kept. Suddenly the body starts growing at a vertiginous rate, and huge toadstools spring up in the living room as well. By the end of the second act the corpse stretches across the entire stage, ready to knock a hole in the front door by the force of its ever-growing feet. Amédée and Madeleine have been forced to make space by piling the furniture in a corner of the room, and are scarcely visible any longer, so much are they dominated by the dead-weight of their meaningless life together, crowded out of house and home by cabinets and corpses. Amédée finally succeeds in pulling the huge body out a window, and drags it through the streets down to the

Seine, but he is discovered by the police, and escapes by simply flying into the air. The ending is weak and somewhat obscure, although Ionesco may wish to suggest by Amédée's buoyancy the elation and complete liberation he experiences upon freeing himself from this burden.

The New Tenant (1954) reminds us of the second act of *Amédée*, but without the body. A man comes to take possession of his new apartment. The movers arrive with the furniture, and carry it into the room, until every inch of space is covered, the windows blocked, and the doors obstructed. The stairway, we learn, is still full of furniture, the streets are crowded, traffic has stopped, and the subway system is paralyzed. Here we are in a universe which has been overcome entirely by matter, and there is nothing to do but follow the example of the New Tenant who, invisible behind tall screens and cupboards, asks the movers to turn out the lights as they leave.

In the early plays, dead matter is suggested not so much by visible objects (although they are present too in the worn out clothing and shabby settings) as by language which is treated not as a living instrument of communication, but as something solidified and lifeless. Words are used for themselves, for their sounds rather than their meanings, and an order of suggestion rather than logic is frequently followed. Ionesco has called *The Bald Soprano* "the tragedy of language," and it is in this play that we witness a total breakdown of communication on the linguistic level. Words are used which have apparent meaning, but in the context in which they are placed they lose their significance and appear absurd and empty. The process begins in the stage directions as the set is described: "English middle-class living room, with English armchairs. An English evening. Mr. Smith, an Englishman, in his English armchair and slippers, etc." The adjective "English" is used to a point where it becomes empty of meaning, ending with the senseless seventeen English strokes on the English clock.

As the play opens Mr. and Mrs. Smith are spending a quiet evening at home. Mrs. Smith, in language strangely reminiscent of conversation manuals (which Ionesco has admittedly used in constructing the dialogue of this play), outlines the meal they have just had, describes the members of the family, and in general indulges in a delightful parody of the inane chit-chat which forms so large a part of daily conversation. Fatuous phrases, trite proverbs which are not at all à propos, and absurd word associations constantly crop up: Roumanian folklorique yogurt, which is good for appendicitis and apotheosis. Mr. Smith emerges from his newspaper to wonder why the ages of the deceased are always given, but never those of the newborn. In the discussion of Bobby Watson, who died two years ago, we see a

complete confusion of time, character and meaning, and yet within each sentence there is sense. It is only when set side by side with the others that the absurdity is apparent. "He died two years ago," says Mr. Smith. "You remember, we went to his funeral a year and a half ago." And later he points out, "People were talking about his death already three years ago." To which Mrs. Smith adds, "Poor Bobby, he had been dead for four years and his body was still warm."

Bobby Watson's wife, it turns out, is also called Bobby Watson, as are his son, daughter, and all the other people to whom he is related. Language has broken down completely, and we are lost in a world where there are no longer any distinguishing tags.

Guests arrive, the Martins and the Captain of the Fire Department. An argument ensues, followed by the usual chit-chat strewn with such original observations as, "The truth lies between the two," "The heart is ageless," "Truth is not found in books, but in life." The guests begin to tell stories, each one more pointless than the other, ending up in the masterly tale told by the Fireman, entitled "The Cold": "My brother-in-law had, on his father's side, a blood cousin whose maternal uncle had a father-in-law whose paternal grandfather had married as a second wife a young native whose brother had met, on one of his voyages a girl with whom he fell in love and by whom he had a son who married . . . etc., etc." This continues for a full page. It is the victory of language over logic, of empty conversation over meaningful discourse, of dead phrases over a living content.

The play ends at a high pitch as the language disintegrates into complete nonsense and unintelligible repetition of syllables, the characters shouting at one another in their anger at not understanding. And as the curtain falls we are back at the beginning of the play, with the Martins occupying the places originally occupied by the Smiths, and Mrs. Martin reciting the same empty phrases that Mrs. Smith had uttered.

In *The Lesson* a professor, at first humble and meek, gives a private lesson to a young girl eager to take her "Total Doctorate." He so dominates her by his "learning" and personality that at the end she is reduced to a somnambulistic state, and he kills her. The knowledge of the young student is dead knowledge, so to speak, for it is not a thing which she really knows, but only something which she has memorized. There is a significant commentary on language in the professor's lecture on philology, which is at the same time a parody of pedantry. In absurd terms, he discusses the "Neo-Spanish" tongues: Spanish, Latin, Italian, Portuguese, Roumanian, Sardanapolous, Spanish and Neo-Spanish. The differences between these related languages, we learn, are imperceptible, since all the words of all the languages are the same. As an example he employs the sentence, "The roses of my

grandmother are as yellow as my grandfather who was Asiatic." In all languages it is identical, and yet when the girl repeats the sentence, it is never correct according to the professor. The only really safe words, it is suggested, are nonsense syllables, for words which are heavy with meaning, always end up succumbing, crumbling, or bursting like balloons.

In *Jack* a nonsense phrase, "I like potatoes with bacon," stands for an acceptance of society and all that it imposes upon us. Jack at first refuses to utter a word, a rebel against his family who want to marry him to Roberte. The family overwhelms him with invective: he is a *mononstre*, *vilenain*, an *actographe*. His sister Jacqueline cries, "Je te déteste, de t'exerte," while his mother reminds him how she taught him to "progresser, transgresser, grasseyer," for she has been all things to him, "une amie, un mari, un marin." As in *The Bald Soprano*, words are no longer used as counters, but simply stand for themselves, meaningless blobs, suggested by other words. Trite phrases are again thrown in for no apparent reason. Jacques finally gives in and accepts, not the original fiancée, but her sister, who has three noses, and nine fingers on one hand. She tells Jacques that in the basement of her chateau all things are called "cat." Again language has broken down completely, and serves absolutely no meaningful purpose. Cats are called cats; insects, cats; chairs, cats; one, cat; two, cat; etc. So whether one wishes to say, "I'm tired, let's go to sleep," or "Bring me some cold noodles, warm lemonade and no coffee," one says, "Cat, cat, cat, cat, cat, etc." "Oh," concludes Jacques, "how easy it is to speak! It's not even worth the trouble." This is also the conclusion of the New Tenant, who, expressing himself in terms of light and dark, simply says good night, turns out the light, and remains in his wordless solitude.

The same techniques are employed in *The Chairs* where "Drink your tea, Semiramis," and "You might have been a general chief, etc.," return with the monotony of a hey-nonny-nonny refrain, and with just about as much meaning. Words suggest other words because of sound, regardless of meaning, and the absurd physical presence of the word is before us once again rather than any reality of which it is a symbol. "Were you sure to invite everyone," asks the Old Woman, "Le Pape, les papillons, et les papiers?" (The Pope, the butterflies and the papers). Several times words are repeated so frequently that they become only a sound, totally emptied of their meaning, as when one repeats one's own name so long that it becomes simply an object in itself. Will the Orator come to reveal the Old Man's message? "Il viendra," (he will come) says the Old Man confidently. And the word is repeated ten times, then changed to the present tense, and repeated five more times.

The ultimate irony is that life itself, even a rich and successful life which contributes something to society (which is certainly not the

case with the two old ruins on the stage before us), is finally reduced to nothing but a word, to a street name. "Let's die and enter into legend," says the Old Woman, "At least we'll have our street." And the old couple plunge to their death repeating ecstatically, "Nous aurons notre rue!"

The Chairs seems to be a transitional play in the career of Ionesco. In it we may see the gross exaggeration of language, and the grotesque characters so typical of the first plays. At the same time, these elements are not so prominent, and there is a certain realism in the presentation of the Old Man and Woman. This realistic presentation of the characters is seen again in *Victims of Duty*, *Amédée* and *The New Tenant*, however fantastic the situations may be. It is in these more "realistic" plays that the visible objects play an important role, and one suspects that this is a sort of compensation for the lack of dead language presented as such and the lack of puppet-like characters who are exaggeratedly mechanical, and therefore representative, once again, of that which is dead and cumbersome rather than vital and potentially spiritual.

For Ionesco's characters are dead, all of them entombed within his restricting universe with walls closing in upon them, and buried also within their own solitude, each one separated from all others in a world where communication is absolutely impossible. The huge cadaver on stage in *Amédée* is not the only dead body in the play, and *Amédée* is fortunate if he is resurrected at the end, for he is the only resurrected character in Ionesco's theater, the only one to escape from this world. He does so only at his wife's expense, for as he ascends he drops upon her head the gigantic hat and beard belonging to the body he has finally gotten rid of.

Even the more realistic characters in the later plays perform meaningless and mechanical activities. *Amédée* is caught up in the senseless repetition of the play he is writing, and of which he never gets beyond the third speech. Madeleine is tangled in the wires of her job as telephone receptionist. And both of them have accepted mechanically, without thinking, the presence of the body in their apartment. In fact, they no longer can remember who it is, or where it came from. The mechanical rhythm of the movers in *The New Tenant* is obvious, as they bring in the furniture. The concierge in the same play speaks in a vacuum, never waits for the answers, but gives them herself.

The Old Woman in *The Chairs* becomes a grotesque automaton as she rushes from door to door bringing in chairs, and when the room is crowded she automatically takes on the role of usher and begins selling programs and candy.

The lack of any individual existence of the characters in *Jack* is underlined by the fact that all the members of one family are called Jacques,

and all those of the other, Robert. The same technique is used in *The Bald Soprano* when Bobby Watson is mentioned. The Martins, in the same play, are so lost in their individual solitude that after years of married life they do not recognize each other. Their life together has been one of mechanical repetition. People are so interchangeable, so anonymous, that at the end of the play the Martins may take the roles assumed at the beginning by the Smiths.

The structure of these plays is frequently circular, and we find ourselves at the end at exactly the same point from which we started out. This is true of *The Bald Soprano*; of *The Lesson*, where the professor kills his student, the bell rings and another student is about to enter as the curtain falls; and of *Victims of Duty*, where everyone is conquered by the inhuman force of duty and the curtain falls on all the characters masticating the hard crust of bread imposed by society, and seeing to it that all the others are doing the same.

Those plays which are not constructed along these lines, usually follow a descending line, beginning with something resembling life, and ending, after absurd repetitions of one kind or another, in absolute silence. *The Chairs* and *The New Tenant* both end on a note of silence and emptiness. The world, dominated by substance, has become a graveyard.

This unhappy outlook on life is, surprisingly enough, presented by Ionesco in a way that is extremely amusing. One reason for this is that he employs the very technique of comedy—reduction of the living to the mechanical, exaggerated repetition—to express his particular view. The heaviness and opacity of life's atmosphere, the overabundance of matter is at least partially relieved by the element of humor, which Ionesco considers a "happy symptom of the other presence," evanescence or lightness. There is a profound unity, then, in this theater, where the very humor which is a symptom of lightness, at the same time makes patent the victory of the anti-spiritual forces in life.

One might be tempted to argue with the author over the paradox which lies at the base of his theatrical conception. But Ionesco is after all a dramatist, and makes (even less than other playwrights) no claims as a thinker. He stands for "pure theater," and we can only be grateful that this paradox has produced plays which are amusing, suggestive, and refreshingly original.

LEONARD C. PRONKO

THE STRATEGY OF SAMUEL BECKETT'S *ENDGAME*

"ART," SAID SAMUEL BECKETT in writing of Proust, "is the apotheosis of solitude." Certainly Beckett belongs with such authors as Proust and Kafka for whom the deadly isolation of individuality precludes communication in terms of conventional surface. The truth of personality is inscrutable: open perhaps to the intuition of the friend or of the reader, but merely distorted by any self-sufficient exercise of analytic reason. Hence the art of writing is, negatively, to render one's subject opaque to analysis; positively it is to invite the reader in his own solitude to grope, to imagine—often through clues which are absurd in their irreducible concreteness—and thus to sense through all the babble of language the meaning of another solitude.

The opacity of Beckett's most recent play, *Endgame*, is easily demonstrated by a description of the bare facts of the play as they would appear to a fresh spectator. Clov, an inferior, stands in the doorway of a barren, grey-lit room, staring at an armchair covered with a white sheet. Two ash-cans, also sheet-covered, stand downstage. Clov pulls off the sheets. The occupant of the armchair is Hamm, a chronic invalid. The occupants of the ash-cans are Hamm's parents, Nagg and Nell. So the "day" starts. As it drags toward its close, the characters complain, reminisce, quarrel, subside. They concern themselves with food, their physical pains, their mutual dislike, their boredom—and above all with their notion that things may be coming to an end. The old people apparently die in their ash-cans. Clov prepares to leave. Hamm is left in center stage as he was first revealed, mute and motionless, his face covered by a bloodstained handkerchief.

In all of this, one misses the ordinary connections of cause and effect which make daily life so manageable. Why and how the world outside has become such a blank is not told. Why Nagg and Nell are confined to ash-cans is not explained. The characters fly into rages on inadequate stimulus. They contradict themselves, they lose the thread of talk. They spend their most intent energies on such trifles as locating Hamm's chair in the exact center of the room. And so on. There is something pitiable here, something terrible, too; but what is it?

The art of reading such a play is not, I think, to reduce it, as Bonamy Dobrée does, to a game of "hunt the symbol." (For Dobrée, *Endgame* turns out to be a morality with Clov as the Body and Hamm as the

Soul.)¹ Being human, the reader must indeed bring his wits to bear on the play; but the trick is to know when to stop. Analysis cannot break every puzzle of *Endgame*. Its construction implicitly ensures that each single hypothesis will create as many problems for the reader as it solves. (For instance, if Clov is the Body and Hamm the Soul, what are Nagg and Nell?) But analysis can qualify the dramatic experience; it can bring the reader to the point of maximum sensitivity where he acquires the artistic faith to trust his own inner vision.

I will attempt a reading of *Endgame*, first by assessing the frames of fantasy in which the action takes place; then by examining the characters; and finally by tracing the tragic action and its implicit effect upon the audience.

II

The one bare room of *Endgame* and its adjoining kitchen constitute a limbo without calendar date or specified locale. Although the older characters recall such definite places as Sedan, the Ardennes, and Lake Como, these settings have evidently vanished as far as they are concerned. The world which Clov examines from the windows is a desert, half earth, half sea, all under a motionless, sunless atmosphere. The characters themselves lack the biographies which would establish them as tax-paying individuals. They have no definite occupation or present relationship to any society. They are the only people there are. From all this abstractness, the reader may safely infer that Man and his Situation are the real objects of the play, which to this extent becomes allegorical.

This limbo plane of reality, however, is complicated by two other planes. As the title *Endgame* (*Fin de Partie*) suggests, the play has many features of a chess game in its last phase. Hamm and Clov have "very red" faces; the faces of Nagg and Nell are "very white." Hamm sits in his armchair like a Red King, helpless, immobile, but central. Like a chess piece, Clov has his own limitations of movement; he is stiff-legged and bound to serve the center-piece.

The theater situation itself is the third reality, as Hamm and Clov frequently refer to themselves as actors who are playing out the routine, making exits, inspecting the house, explicitly speaking asides, soliloquies, and set narratives. Limbo, chess game, stage play—each one would by itself provide a ready frame for parable. The three blended together provide a compound reality in *Endgame* which is triply suggestive, avoiding the simple one-to-one correspondence of allegory to theme which would stultify the reader's imagination.

On any plane this is a horrible world which is grinding to a stop.

1. Bonamy Dobrée, "The London Theater, 1957," *The Sewanee Review* (Winter, 1958), LXVI, 146-160.

"All is corpsed" in this limbo. There are no more tides to the ocean, no sun, no greenery in the hills. Seeds no longer sprout. "Nature has forgotten us," observes Hamm; except that in her tired malignance she still strips these people of hair, teeth, bloom. Or, to take the chess analogy, the board has shrunk; there are no other squares for Hamm to go to, though he desperately considers some last escape. If he is victor, in the sense of out-surviving the White pieces Nagg and Nell, the end of the chess game will see *all* pieces swept into the box. Or, to take the theater situation, his play is nearly acted out, except for a few more routines, feeble revisions, and his "last soliloquy."

The few comforts of life—rather, its few palliatives—are vanishing. There is no more pap for the old people, no more sugar-plums or Turkish Delight, no more pain-killer, no coffins for decent burial. By contrast, the pains, infirmities, and sordidness of existence have slowly accumulated until the actors live in an inferno which monotony has made all the more crushing. Hamm is blind. He cannot stand. He bleeds chronically, he suffers from a dripping in his head, he soils himself. Nagg and Nell are legless. They are cold, starving, and itching. The sand in their ash-cans has not been changed. Clov, the youngest and most vigorous, is stiff in the legs; his eyesight is bad; he stinks.

Life itself has lost continuity. Nothing is done efficiently. Thus for Clov, the mere moving of a ladder so that he may look out of a window becomes a baffling problem in logistics to be solved by trial and error. The conversation proceeds by jerks and pauses. Nonsequiturs and contradictions are frequent. Sometimes Hamm and Clov will talk independently, each of his own topic. Hamm may ask a question and not listen to the answer. They may reply ambiguously, out of indifference to the point at hand; or they may debate with furious energy such a trifle as Hamm's toy dog. Like broken records, they return and return to the same utterances: "Is it not time for my pain-killer?" "Am I right in the center?" "I'll leave you," "What's happening?" The conversation traps them in compulsive routines, so that they exhort one another: "Keep going, can't you, keep going!" It is hard to suppose Clov far wrong when he says, "No one that ever lived ever thought so crooked as we."

In such a crooked-grained universe (as it has turned out), Hamm finds himself; and his predicament, seriously considered, will call for a crooked-grained tragedy. The older, nobler opponents of Hamm's predecessors in tragedy have vanished. There are no gods for him to challenge as Oedipus did; there is no Providence, no Spirit of Nature. Even Fate has retired, in favor of mere entropy: the uncertain running-down of a chaos which had once presented some accidental beauty. Whether the reader takes *Endgame* to show the ultimate destiny of humanity or the ultimate spiritual location of any sensitive individual,

the fact remains that a less dignified setting could hardly be imagined for Hamm, the present representative of man.

III

What are Hamm's possibilities? To begin with, his very name seems ambiguous, suggesting both Hamlet and "ham actor"—profound sensitivity and shallow exhibitionism. "Can there be misery—" he demands in his opening speech—"loftier than mine?" But a yawn accompanies the question. Hamm does manage a proud zest at times: "We're getting on!" "Ah the old questions, the old answers, there's nothing like them!" At other times he seems paralyzed by the cliché of existence: "This is slow work," "This is not much fun," "Have you not had enough?" He apparently longs for death: "I'll tell you the combination of the cupboard if you promise to finish me." But the conversation soon drifts elsewhere.

In most drama it is of highest importance that the reader should know which characters to believe and when; how is he otherwise to determine the real issues of the play and to form the appropriate sympathies? Here is a play in which testimony is essentially slippery. There is no "real," "sincere" Hamm in the ordinary use of those adjectives. He can be credited, perhaps, when he expresses the animal, glandular reactions of pain, anger, physical relief. Perhaps he is a shade more trustworthy when he is alone than when he speaks to others, for each additional listener provides him a new chance for deception. Basically, by the skewed nature of things, Hamm cannot know himself. Every assertion is an occasion for self-doubt, for irony at his own expense. He swears to Nagg on his "honor," and at once joins Nagg in laughter. He acts; he is always acting. Here, of course, is one special value of the theater-plane of this fantasy—that the true self is so much of a myth that people, like certain actors, can exist only by devising roles.

Although the true self may be a myth, selfishness is not. Hamm the eccentric is anthropocentric, egocentric, to the point of obsession. "Am I right in the center?" he demands. Mere approximateness of location enrages him. Clov must edge the chair this way and that until Hamm feels precisely central. There Hamm is as preoccupied with his own physical condition as any hypochondriac. He takes an exhibitionist's pride in his own little narratives, his trite agonies. He cannot endure contradiction; even though Clov convinces him that opening the window will be futile, he screams that it be opened none the less. Like a spoiled child in its highchair, he blows his whistle, orders, scolds.

Like Dostoevsky's *Underground Man* (his spiritual ancestor), Hamm is ill with self-infatuation and self-disillusion alike. Haunted by his own emptiness, he takes the usual morbid remedy: of trying to prove his reality by the infliction of pain upon others:

HAMM:

I've made you suffer too much.

(*Pause.*)

Haven't I?

CLOV:

It's not that.

HAMM (*shocked*):

I haven't made you suffer too much!

CLOV:

Yes!

HAMM (*relievedly*):

Ah you gave me a fright!

When Clov brings him his toy dog, Hamm wants the dog posed as if begging for a bone: "Leave him like that, standing there imploring me."

The result is that all the characters, chained together, strike out at one another in exquisite mutual torture. "If I could kill him," says Clov, "I'd die happy." He delivers Hamm's gaff to him with obscene insolence; later he strikes Hamm furiously with the toy dog, in a helpless tantrum. Hamm storms at Nagg: "Scoundrell! Why did you engender me?" Nagg chuckles at his son's pain. Life has gone on like this until Clov can define "yesterday" as "that bloody awful day, long ago, before this bloody awful day." It is hard in a few lines to convey the suffering of Hamm's company: the raw nerves, the nastiness, the explosions—even worse, the dull formal apologies and, above all, the grinding inconclusiveness. Such horrid passages as this can be delivered as commonplace:

HAMM:

Last night I saw inside my breast. There was a big sore.

CLOV:

Pah! You saw your heart.

HAMM:

No, it was living.

Or this:

HAMM:

If you leave me how shall I know? . . . How would I know, if you were merely dead in your kitchen?

CLOV:

Well . . . sooner or later I'd start to stink.

HAMM:

You stink already.

Or this:

HAMM:

Use your head, can't you, use your head, you're on earth, there's no cure for that!

Despite all the brutishness of hunger, cold, and stink, this is a peculiarly *human* suffering which arises from the peculiarly human desire to *mean something*. Each character does have a vision of meaning, however bizarre. For old Nagg and Nell, subsiding into stupor, the vision comes through memory ("Ah yesterday!"). They laugh and dream about old days of rowing on Lake Como, of hearing Nagg's favorite joke. But Clov, the youngest, has never known such a world, or any world but this dreary life with Hamm. He has a small vision, none the less: the relief from this squalid nonsense which death will bring:

I say to myself—sometimes, Clov, you must learn to suffer better than that if you want then to weary of punishing you—one day. . . .

(Pause.)

Then one day, suddenly, it ends, it changes. I don't understand, it dies, or it's me, I don't understand, that either. . . .

(Pause.)

I open the door of the cell and go. I am so bowed I only see my feet, if I open my eyes, and between my legs a little trail of black dust. I say to myself that the earth is extinguished, though I never saw it lit. . . .

(Pause.)

When I fall I'll weep for happiness.

Hamm differs from the others in that he alone can feel spasms of hope. He has once seen an invitation to life in the loveliness of "all that rising corn . . . the sails of the herring fleet!" And he now dreams of lovely forests, of horizons, of distant lands still green. He can try to pray, he can conceive of escaping. His soiled faith in himself gives Hamm, in such a world, a tragic stature.

IV

The tragic action of *Endgame* shows Hamm's last efforts to escape the universal destiny of zero, his last exploration of the checkmate position, his last efforts to bring off his own hackneyed scenario. The opening episodes provide the exposition of Hamm's situation, poised between the inertia of intolerable monotony and the darkness of extinction. Of this enough has been said. Then, with Hamm's outburst against his parents—with his junking them so to speak by ordering Clov to screw down the lids of their ash-bins—his struggles begin. They rise and fall, but mainly fall, as follows:

In the conviction that something is at last happening, Hamm ventures to wonder:

We're not beginning to . . . to . . . mean something? . . . Imagine if a rational being came back to earth, wouldn't he be liable to get ideas into his head if he observed us long enough. (*Voice of rational being.*) "Ah, good, now I see what it is, yes, now I understand what they're at!" (. . . *Normal voice.*) And without going

so far as that, we ourselves . . . (*with emotion*) . . . we ourselves . . . at certain moments . . . (*Vehemently.*) To think perhaps it won't all have been for nothing!

A minute later he breaks out ardently:

Let's go from here, the two of us! South! You can make a raft and the currents will carry us away, far away, to other . . . mammals!

But the first-mentioned flight of feeling degenerates into their excitement over a flea in Clov's pants; and the second rises from Hamm's momentary euphoria from urinating in his own pants. Such fine moments—and there are one or two others—are mere iridescent bubbles in the sewer muck. Hamm's sense of ultimate darkness deepens on nearly every page. He prophesies to Clov:

One day you'll be blind, like me. You'll be sitting there, a speck in the void, in the dark, for ever, like me . . . Infinite emptiness will be all around you, all the resurrected dead of all the ages wouldn't fill it, and there you'll be like a little bit of grit in the middle of the steppe.

In the meantime there are the last dregs of vanity to taste—the toy-dog to tyrannize over, the vaudeville duel of wit:

CLOV:

Do you believe in the life to come?

HAMM:

Mine was always that.

(*Exit Clov.*)

Got him that time!

Again, there is Hamm's "story"—his own creation, his own artistic ordering of experience, his own little exhibition. He has worked on his story a bit each day. It is a wretched narrative, Hamm cannot get rid of its triteness, he frequently forgets its thread, he cannot bring it to a significant ending; but it does offer a trivial pastime in which he can play God. To provide the necessary audience, Nagg is roused in his ash-bin and bribed, with the promise of a sugar-plum, to listen. Hamm tells of a stranger who had crawled to him on a Christmas Eve, after a three days' journey, to ask for bread for his child. While relishing the man's groveling, Hamm had seen no sense in preserving the child on such a dying earth. With the man still prostrate ("with his mad eyes, in defiance of my wishes"), the story breaks off. Like Hamm's own life, after all, it has had sufficient agony but no clear point. Now Hamm directs them all to pray to God. They try. They fail.

This collapse of prayer, which can be called the turning-point of the tragedy, completes Hamm's fruitless survey of the possibilities for escape. The moment is grotesquely cheap. Nagg demands his sugar-plum, only to be told that his son's promise was fraudulent; there are no more

sugar-plums. At such treachery, committed for the sake of a joyless vanity, Nagg curses Hamm:

I hope the day will come when you'll really need to have me listen to you, and need to hear my voice, any voice. (*Pause.*) Yes, I hope I'll live till then, to hear you calling me like when you were a tiny boy, and were frightened, in the dark, and I was your only hope.

Then the old man disappears into his ash-bin for the last time.

Hamm's comment, "Our revels now are ended," announces the final phase of *Endgame*, Hamm's preparation for extinction. A curious thing happens here. In taking farewell of life, Hamm has Clov wheel him to the window to feel the light (he feels nothing); he has the window opened so that he can hear the waves (he hears nothing); he orders Clov to survey the outside for the last time. Their tone is increasingly agitated and violent until Clov takes up the telescope. Then, to his dismay, he thinks that he detects a *small boy*. Hamm forbids him to go see:

HAMM:

If he exists he'll die there or he'll come here. And if he doesn't . . .
(*Pause.*)

CLOV:

You don't believe me? You think I'm inventing?
(*Pause.*)

HAMM:

It's the end, Clov, we've come to the end. I don't need you any more.

Clov is now released. Somehow the small boy is forgotten in the eloquent but loveless farewells which follow. Does he exist? For Hamm it can't matter, nor can it matter, one infers, for Clov. Perhaps the pathos of existence will go on passing from generation to generation: from Nagg to Hamm to Clov to the possible boy; but with each generation it will lose some of its poignancy. Clov cannot feel pain as Hamm does, because Clov does not hope. Hamm—self-assertive, puzzled, groping—sits at the farthest verge of genuine tragedy. Beyond him the generations will be increasingly "beat," subsiding in apathy.

Hamm does not subside in apathy. Nagg's curse has conferred on him a certain maimed dignity, for a curse, like a prayer, affirms something of life. Hamm will meet darkness in the role prophesied, as a crying son. Even before Clov took leave of him, he began to enact this crying-out. Now, as he sits alone in center-stage, he calls out "Father," to perform at least the ritual of suffering like a man. After this there is nothing more to be said or acted or played. He sits, face covered with the blood-stained handkerchief. The curtain falls.

V

Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* showed a mankind bruised but still expectant. *Endgame* shows the same mankind in its next stage, when Godot is no longer looked for. The ultimate picture in both dramas is of a world without certainty, intelligibility—or even joy. By some freak a being has appeared in this world with eccentric notions of beauty, order, truth (there is no reason in such a chaos why such a monstrosity might not appear as well as some other monstrosity). He is therefore condemned by the very stuff of which he is made to be crippled, fearful, bored, repellent to himself, nasty to others, transparently hypocritical even in his own eyes. He lacks the dignity of the alien because he is not really alien; nor can he feel at home. Perhaps the basic "truth" of *Endgame* is that man simply has no entity; there is nothing isolatably human to which he can cling as a guarantee.

There is only—if we are to relish this horrible paradox—the moment when he recognizes that he has no essence, like the hypothetical instant when a workman is aware that the dynamite in his hands has begun to detonate. At this tenuous and terribly isolated moment (which actually endures at random), he may achieve a kind of selfhood. With oblivion exploding in his face, he may invent a posture, he may try halfheartedly to be kind to his fellows, he may practice a mute loyalty. Considering the odds against such a creature, this is enough heroism to evoke tragic pity. It is enough, perhaps, to justify William Barrett's saying that "Beckett is one of those who is really living beyond despair."

Beckett's technique is not merely suited to represent such an outlook in dramatic terms; it actually creates it in the spectator. Its nightmarish commonplaces, its vacillations of terror and burlesque, its instabilities of analogy and of psychological distance—all hinder the spectator from such abstract critical responses as *finding the point*. The point—so limp and pallid when valued for itself—is there for subsequent readings. At first exposure, Beckett forces one to experience as well as to witness his subject, which is an anti-human reality. The shock is peculiarly and valuably human.

RICHARD M. EASTMAN

MIRACLE ON BROADWAY: AND THE BOX-OFFICE MAGIC OF THE *BIBLE*

ARCHIBALD MACLEISH'S *J.B.*, a verse recasting of the biblical Job story, opened on Broadway several months ago to excited customer and critical acclaim. The play's immediate box-office success was made more piquant by its arrival in the midst of a pre-Christmas newspaper strike that seemingly prevented the usual advance advertising and public preparation, a fact emphasized by both *Time* and *Life*. No direct claim of divine intervention was made, but *Life's* double year's-end entertainment issue not only captioned the miracle of the play's "triumph without benefit of newspapers," but between shots of a pleading Job and painfully concentrated author and producer, made only fleeting reference to the favorable reactions, "reported in bits and pieces over TV, radio, and by word of mouth."

Seemingly eager to revel in a modern "miracle," the Luce publications thus virtually ignored the various peculiarly fortunate "external" factors contributing to the play's warm reception. Yet these carefully planned, as well as fortuitous, "extras" contributed much to the production's success. And actually if local newspaper coverage was lacking, that of the other media was not. For example, both NBC and CBS were more than generous with television and radio time. Author, director, and actors appeared before cameras and mikes on key coast-to-coast programs for several days prior to curtain time. That they did their jobs well is not surprising, for these gentlemen comprise what the sportswriters would term "an all-star lineup." Author-lawyer MacLeish is former Librarian of Congress, Assistant Secretary of State, head of the American UNESCO delegation, and holder of two Pulitzer Prizes ("33" and "52"). He is probably second only to Robert Frost in being the American poet best known to his countrymen. Director Elia Kazan has gained an enviable reputation on both stage and screen for his adroit handling of Tennessee Williams' dramatic shockers and Marlon Brando's temperamental talents. Raymond Massey has created the twentieth century's dramatic image of Lincoln, thus his *J.B.* role of God may well seem to many but a small step up. And young Shakespearean Christopher Plummer, who plays Satan, scored heavily several seasons back as Oedipus on TV's *Omnibus*. Only the key role of modern-businessman Job is played by an "unknown," Pat Hingle, a Texas actor of fullback proportions. However, even these noteworthy gentlemen do not merit all of the credit for the public's openhanded treatment of a modern biblical verse-tale that had not been "adequately advertised."

Actually, the nation's literary-minded were informed of the play's ex-

istence more than a year ago by a *Saturday Review* lead article hailing its publication. Poetry editor John Ciardi, modern poetry's white-plumed knight, praised MacLeish's "great technical achievement . . . his forging of a true poetic stage line for our times." But if Mr. Ciardi, currently the most vocal and articulate exponent of the textual-analytic approach to the poetic page, was first to proclaim publicly *J.B.'s* literary qualities, he was not to be alone. Other reviewers echoed his praise. (A critical reaction downgrading Ciardi's estimate is only now asserting itself.) And the Book Find Club coupled it with Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World Revisited* for a double selection, reprinting the gist of Ciardi's review. Ciardi's evaluation has already been proved wrong—if only partially—in at least one instance: Recognizing that Broadway would grasp the poem's dramatic potentialities "in time," he predicted that it was "too strong . . . for Broadway this season or next." Yet it has been welcomed to the theater with almost indecent haste. Obviously producer Alfred De Liarge, Kazan, and backers harbored no serious doubts (at least not serious enough to prevent venturing) that the biblical box-office magic, cultivated so continuously and successfully by Hollywood, would prevail. Emboldened by critical enthusiasm, they could feel assured the nation's conforming intellectuals would queue up with panting eagerness to witness a graphic reaffirmation of the durability of the ancient verities. They could rely also on equal acceptance from the sensitive horde of general theatergoers whose egos have been rubbed raw since Sputnik I by constant reminders of intellectual shortcomings.

Undoubtedly Job's current success must be stirring the greatest excitement in Hollywood. For in this favored land not only are miracles a staple but it is written that each new epic must surpass in grandeur and size the panoramic vistas of its predecessors. And here in recent years Samson, Delilah, David, Bathsheba, John the Baptist, Salome, and—most recently—Moses have reaped so rich a harvest that Solomon and Simon Peter are even now girding their loins for the wide-wide screen. Mr. Ciardi's courage is lacking, so no predictions will be made here. But even the most innocent movie-fan easily may imagine a scene possibly recurring in that corner of Paramount Studios where the earth's largest circus tent gathers dust. Here the disciples of the studio's recently departed Patriarch may stand gazing thoughtfully at the heavens and musing upon the inevitable torrent of manna resulting from a biblicoscopic amalgam of Broadway success, circus tent, God, Satan, Job-as-modern-businessman, deserting wife, and atomic attack (a small mid-East army could again be pressed into service).

Of course the ending, as usual, would have to be made more believable, but it could be done—and in color.

BEN SIEGEL

THEATER IN LONDON

THERE IS ONE MARVELOUS THING about the theater in London—the most expensive seat in the house is cheaper than the cheapest seat in a New York theater. In many theaters a gallery seat costs only the equivalent of 35 cents. There, unfortunately, the list of good things about the London theater ends. The West-end theaters produce for the most part trashy commercial vehicles, revues, and musicals—in short, pretty much the same thing as may be seen at any time in the Broadway theaters. But the New York theatergoer is never starved for good plays. There is always the off-Broadway theater with anywhere from ten to twenty little theaters presenting good drama—plays by promising new authors, avant-garde experimental theater, classics, and revivals of worthwhile failures which deserved a better fate. London has practically no counterpart to the off-Broadway theater. Only the Royal Court, the Theatre Royal, The Tower, and the Unity can compare with New York's live-wire theaters; and of these the latter two are non-professional.

The Royal Court theater, which is well off the theatrical track in Chelsea, and the Theatre Royal, which is far out in East London, are both partially subsidized by the Arts Council. Both have done much to introduce new British authors to the public. The Theatre Royal was the first to produce Brendan Behan, now enjoying some success off-Broadway with *The Quare Fellow*, and Shelagh Delany, whose *A Taste of Honey* is soon to receive a West-end production. The Royal Court holds a series of "Productions without Decor" and readings for its members and has so far introduced such promising new dramatists as N. F. Simpson, Donald Howarth, Arnold Wesker, Michael Hastings, John Arden, Ann Jellicoe, and Errol John. Its regular productions, open to the public, usually run four weeks and then transfer to a West-end theater if the reception warrants such a move; it rarely does.

During my stay in London the Royal Court put on two plays. The first, *Moon on a Rainbow Shawl* by Errol John, is an excellently conceived play about a man's ruthless attempt to wrench himself out of his stifling environment, in this case Trinidad. The cast, headed by the American actor Earl Hyman, was by far the best I saw in London. The other production was *The Long and the Short and the Tall* by Willis Hall, a story about a doomed patrol of British soldiers in the Malayan jungle during the last war. This play was saved by its racy dialogue and by the excellent acting of an all-male cast. What little plot it has is trite and revolves around the reactions of the various members of the patrol to a Japanese prisoner whom they capture. I kept hoping that the Japanese prisoner would *not* take out pictures

of his wife and children (including one baby too young to be photographed but indicated by tenderly cradling arms), but he did.

The Theatre Royal bowed to the almost mandatory English theatrical custom of doing a seasonal play at Christmas and did a wonderfully lively adaptation of *A Christmas Carol* while I was there. For me the high point of the production was the device used to close the first act. Scrooge steps out and glowers at the audience: "What are *you* laughing at? Well, stop it. Bah! (*yells backstage*) And ring down the curtain!"

Christmas plays are a peculiarly British custom. Nowhere else is the hybrid creature known as pantomime to be found, fortunately. The pantomimes, based on the old fairy tale stories, vary from year to year as new gags are thought of and new topical jokes inserted, but there is one Christmas play which never changes. *Where the Rainbow Ends* was first produced forty-eight years ago and has remained popular at the Christmas season ever since. Not a word of the original script has ever been changed, and the purity of the text is jealously guarded by the heirs of the authors. So remarkably bad and so peculiarly English is this script that it deserves a few words of description.

The first act is pure mid-nineteenth century melodrama, replete with wicked aunt and uncle cheating patriotic young naval cadet (age about ten) of his rightful inheritance. The dialogue abounds in such quaint expressions, dear to the heart of the English schoolboy, as sneak, rotter, bounder, ripping. The patriotic young naval cadet and his sister decide to travel—via magic carpet—to the "land where the rainbow ends," where they believe they will find their shipwrecked parents. To get there they have to travel through the land of the Dragon King (frighteningly played with great melodramatic relish by Míchéal Mac-Líammóir). Despite the dire threats ponderously fulminated from time to time by the Dragon King, they come to no ultimate harm because they are under the protection of St. George of England, a part played for the eighth year in succession by an actor with the amusingly un-English name of Anton Dolin. The children are also protected throughout by a lion cub, which gives rise to the line, "Dog? That's not a dog! That's a lion!!," better known as the punch line of a popular shaggy dog story. The children finally triumph, of course; and the play ends with an impressive tableau in which St. George, "the ideal that lies in all English hearts," stands centrestage with upraised sword and intones, "Rise, youth of England, let your voices ring, / For God, for Britain and for Queen." It struck me that the effect on impressionable young minds was rather unfortunate.

We come now to a rather painful subject—the Old Vic. I suppose as Americans we should feel grateful since the English have certainly paid us the compliment of sending us their first team. After seeing the superb productions of *Richard II* and *Troilus and Cressida* by the Old

Vic company headed by Paul Rogers and John Neville in Chicago last year, I went to the London Old Vic with high hopes. It was not merely that the resident company failed to compare with the touring company: it failed to compare with any competent theater company. I have seen better performances of *Macbeth* and *Julius Caesar* by American undergraduates. Later I discovered that most knowledgeable London playgoers consider the Old Vic a joke and never go. The audiences are composed mainly of unwary tourists and schoolchildren.

Take the *Macbeth* production, for example. Michael Hordern, the Macbeth, spoke his lines competently enough, but so slowly—in keeping with the general pace of the production—that the effect was soporific instead of exciting. This pace was particularly noticeable in what should be the liveliest parts—the witches' scenes. Instead of three withered but lively old hags the Old Vic gave us two sleepy old hags and an apprentice. I really did think the second witch would doze off before she had drawled her way through the line, "I come, graymalkin." The one I call an apprentice looked and acted like a refugee from the Casino de Paris chorus line. Also it's about time someone realized that the Porter is not drunk: he has a hangover. The only occasion on which I saw this difficult scene played correctly was last summer in San Diego, Calif., of all unlikely places. The porter should be played by a competent comic actor. The man who played it at the Old Vic got a tremendous laugh right at the beginning of the scene, which so disconcerted him that he rushed pell-mell through the rest of the scene in mortal dread of getting another one. He didn't. Although it is admittedly impossible to bring Birnam Wood onstage (a good reason for not trying), surely Douglas Seale, the director could have thought of something better than having five actors solemnly trudge down the stage bearing Christmas trees (undecorated, fortunately). This manoeuvre was very properly greeted with derisive laughter from the gallery, where I sat. These may seem to be carping criticisms, but it is little things like these which spoil a production. And certainly one might expect to be spared such gaucheries by a company which represents the Old Vic.

I have already mentioned the paucity of serious plays in London's West-end theaters. The most successful of the few is *Five Finger Exercise* by Peter Shaffer, which has been running at the Comedy Theatre since July. Next season it will probably be produced in New York, where it will fail. The play is about the relations between an impossibly Philistine father, an equally impossibly possessive mother, a son with an Oedipus complex and vague homosexual tendencies, a fourteen-year-old daughter (played by an actress in her mid-twenties who looked her age), and a German tutor whose problem is that his father is still a rabid Nazi. This tutor is the catalyst of the action—the component

who serves as the focal point for all the petty neuroticisms of the family. The mother develops a sort of "cultural crush" on him, and he tries to get her to be a second mother to him; the father hates him because he is "arty"; and the son can't make up his mind whether to be jealous of him because of his mother or whether to feel attracted to him. The whole turgid mess resolves itself in the time-tested Victorian manner when the tutor tries to gas himself. Mr. Shaffer's technique in preparing for this final scene (a stuck phonograph needle tells us of the suicide attempt) had all the subtlety of Scribe himself. He might have spared himself the trouble: even the duller minds in the audience could see what was coming five minutes in advance. My impression of the play as a whole was that the author seemed feebly to remember in tranquillity a long-gone-by reading of *The Silver Cord*. It is only fair to mention that most of the theater people I spoke to liked this play, but even they readily admitted there was nothing else worth seeing in the West-end.

Other plays running successfully in London were *Auntie Mame*, in which Beatrice Lillie was wasting her time; two plays by Agatha Christie, one of them, *The Mousetrap*, in its seventh year; *The Tunnel of Love* and *Two for the Seesaw*, two typical Broadway successes; *Hot Summer Night*, an honest but bull-headed treatment of London's color problem; *Peter Pan*, with Sarah Churchill floating around in the title role; eight musicals, three revues and, of course, the Windmill Revue-ville, now in its 27th year.

Just before I left London a new play by Clemence Dane, appropriately titled *Eighty in the Shade*, opened at the Globe Theatre. I easily restrained myself from going to see it.

GEORGE WELLWARTH

DENMARK AND THE MODERN DRAMA

THE POSITION OF THE MODERN DRAMA IN DENMARK today suggests a conviction that the drama is a part of the national cultural life which deserves not only encouragement but also subvention by central or municipal government. Although the principle that the Danish stage has an obligation specifically to Danish drama may be implicit in this conviction, there is no chauvinistic desire to emphasize Danish plays at the expense of more renowned works by foreign authors. The Danish drama enjoys considerable largesse on several levels from the body politic, but most plays presented in Denmark are of foreign origin.

Curiously enough, the legitimate stage is, quantitatively speaking, not the first medium of drama for the Danish public. There are half a dozen theaters of serious intent for the nearly one million inhabitants of the Danish capital, as well as highly respectable municipal theaters in the three next largest cities (Aarhus, pop. 118,000; Odense, pop. 110,000; Aalborg, pop. 85,000), traveling companies, and organizations which arrange theatrical performances for school children in both cities and villages—but the legitimate theaters *in toto* give fewer plays annually than are broadcast by the Danish state radio.

The modern drama since Ibsen, and particularly the native Danish drama, has found an expansive and grateful medium in the ether. During the 1957-58 season, no fewer than one hundred different plays were read over the radio and thirty-five were transmitted by television. In each case, half were by Danish playwrights, a noticeably higher proportion than on the stages of the country, which show a preference for plays from France and the United States. The majority of Danish plays read were contemporary; a small minority were taken from the classical Danish repertoire (Holberg, Johan Ludvig Heiberg, J. C. Hostrup). Kaj Munk (1898-1944), Denmark's leading dramatist during the thirties and early forties, was represented by six plays; Kjeld Abell (b. 1901) by two (one of which was his masterpiece *Anna Sophie Hedvig*), Hans Christian Branner (b. 1903) by two; and Leck Fischer (1904-1956), C. E. Soya (b. 1896), Finn Methling (b. 1917), and the older Johannes V. Jensen (1873-1950) by one each.

Of the foreign plays read, only four were not post-Ibsen: Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Sheridan's *School for Scandal*, Molière's *Misanthrope*—and Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. The rest constituted a variegated representation of Western drama: plays by Giraudoux, Anouilh, and Gélyaldy; John Drinkwater, Ernest Raymond, and James Bridie; G. B.

Shaw, Sean O'Casey, and J. M. Synge; Dylan Thomas; Samuel Beckett; Arthur Miller—whose *The Crucible* was, unexpectedly, the sole American drama read; Sergio Pugliese; F. Garcia Lorca; the Swiss Friedrich Dürrenmatt and the German Peter Hirche. The other Scandinavian countries were represented by the Icelander, Jóhann Sigurjónsson; the Swedes, Sigfrid Siwertz, Pär Lagerkvist, Bo Widerberg, and Björn-Erik Höijer; the Norwegians by Tormod Skagestad, Odd Eide, and Tarjei Vesaas. In addition to these plays, all given in Danish translation, one, by Hjalmar Söderberg, was broadcast in the original Swedish, and three, by Ibsen, Gunnar Heiberg, and Terje Stigen, were broadcast in Norwegian from recordings made in Sweden and Norway respectively.

Of the Danish plays given on television, four were from the classical Danish repertoire. Modern Danish dramatists again included Munk, Fischer, Soya, and Methling. American drama led the foreign offerings, with plays by Tennessee Williams, Thornton Wilder, and William Saroyan. Other dramatists translated were Shaw, Synge, Louis Verneuil, Georges Courteline, the Dutch Jan de Hartog, and the Swedish Werner Aspenström.

That the same ratio between domestic and foreign authors obtained with the television performances and the plays read suggests clearly that the policy of the state radio is to divide time and honors equally between Danish and non-Danish playwrights. The broad selection of plays, and in particular the generous inclusion of contemporary Swedish and Norwegian drama is indicative of the earnestness with which the administration of the Danish state radio takes its educational function as well as its role as a contributor to better understanding among the Scandinavian countries. Intellectuals and friends of Northern coöperation have often deplored the fact that the modern drama of Sweden and Norway does not have a place on the Danish stage. They should find solace in the repertoire of the Danish radio theater.

While the serious intent of the radio theater may be applauded and many words of commendation might be expended describing the quality of the actors employed for the broadcasts and the great virtue of there being no advertising to despoil them, it is a moot question how many persons listen to the broadcasts, and, more especially, who concentrates on the broadcasts from beginning to end. It has been this writer's observation that the broadcasts do not command the undivided attention of listeners in Danish homes. A second unanswered question is to what degree the transmission of plays by radio or television discourages attendance at Danish theaters, or, by increasing cultural orientation, possibly encourages attendance. In any case, judging by the principles of selection employed by the state radio, it is clear that the function of radio broadcasts is not merely to entertain.

If the impact of the radio theater is difficult to determine, the prestige and influence of the Royal Theater, now in its two hundred and eleventh season, is easy to ascertain. The significance of this institution in Danish cultural life may be inferred from the fact that its annual subvention is approximately the same as the cost of feeding the Danish navy or of administering the Danish Foreign Office. Its cyclical repertoire includes opera and ballet as well as drama played on two stages, generally before filled houses. With the century-old People's Theater (Folke-teatret), which is private, the Royal Theater sustains both traditional and contemporary Danish drama. In 1957-58, both theaters played Holberg and Hostrup and both played Soya. The Royal Theater also presented works by Munk, Branner, and Methling, in addition to Danish versions of Ibsen and Strindberg, Anouilh and de Montherlant, and Tennessee Williams.

At the other, private, theaters of Copenhagen, domestic drama gets short shrift. In 1957-58 the New Theater played Anouilh, Giraudoux, and Faulkner (*Requiem for a Nun*, in Faulkner's own version). A number of lesser works by Terence Rattigan, John Patrick, Enid Bagnold, and other foreign dramatists accounted for the rest of the Copenhagen season at the other theaters.

The municipal theaters of Odense, Aalborg, and Aarhus, the sole permanent representatives of legitimate stage outside the capital, have ambitious repertoires which compare favorably with that of the Royal Theater. In 1957-58, each theater played one work by a contemporary Danish dramatist (Munk, Soya, Abell). Otherwise they alternated between classical works (Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Holberg, Schiller, Ibsen) and such modern plays as *Anne Frank's Diary*, O'Neill's *Anna Christie*, Anouilh's *Le Rendez-vous de Senlis*, Odet's *The Country Girl*, Fritz Hochwälder's *Das heilige Experiment*, and several other French, English, and American pieces of lesser note, as well as some opera and operetta. John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* on the Odense stage aroused much interest and comment.

Considerable initiative was evinced during the 1957-58 season by the municipal theaters in arranging guest performances by foreign companies. Thus, Odense and Aarhus each saw a performance of Goethe's *Iphigenie* by the "Ruhr-Festspiele" company, and Odense had guest performances by the Lübeck Theater (playing Kaj Munk in German) and the City Theater of Norrköping-Linköping, Sweden (three one-act plays by Strindberg). The receptivity of the Odense Theater toward German drama is notable since German drama is not otherwise played in Denmark, aside from the perennial German musical comedies such as *Ein Walzertraum*. Two of the plays given by the state radio were translated from the German, to be sure, but one was by a Swiss dramatist, and only a single play was by a German playwright. Not only did

two German companies visit Odense, but the Odense Theater kept Schiller's *Maria Stuart* on its repertoire from the previous seasons.

Like the German, Swedish and Norwegian plays were conspicuous by their absence from Danish stages. There were two performances by the visiting company in Odense, and two performances of Hjalmar Bergman's *His Grace's Testament* at the People's Theater in Copenhagen by the company of the Swedish Theater of Helsinki; otherwise Swedish drama was represented only by Strindberg's *Miss Julie* at the Royal Theater, under the supervision of the Swedish director Alf Sjöberg. Such efforts on behalf of the Swedish drama are indicative of good will toward a sister country and the acceptance of the idea of Northern coöperation rather than an active interest in the Swedish drama for its own sake. In this connection it might be noted that the Royal Theater last year gave guest performances of two Danish plays in Stockholm and Gothenburg, and that the People's Theater made a flying trip to the capitals of Sweden, Finland, Norway, and Iceland and presented Soyars' *Thirty Years' Reprieve* at four national theaters.

The semi-official organization which through its several branches in Copenhagen and elsewhere in the country arranges special performances for school children, functions in the same didactic spirit as the state radio. The 50,000 Copenhagen children who for a moderate fee participated in the program, attended special performances of *Le malade imaginaire* at the New Theater and saw the corps de ballet of the Royal Theater perform in the concert hall of Tivoli Gardens. In addition, the younger children attended a modern play by Leck Fischer and the older children saw Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie*. Jutland's counterpart of the Copenhagen organization arranged—for over 30,000 children—performances of *Anne Frank's Diary* and John Patrick's *The Hasty Heart* as well as two classics, *Le malade imaginaire* and Schiller's *Maria Stuart* (by the Odense company). Under similar arrangements, children of other towns and villages were able to see *The Hasty Heart* and *Anne Frank's Diary*, the latter played no fewer than eighty-one times by a travelling company in various parts of the country.

Conceived like the thirty-year-old school theater is a younger institution known as the "People's Stage," which sends out its own travelling company. In its fourth season, 1957-58, it gave Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* seventy times and Robert Anderson's *Tea and Sympathy* forty times to adult audiences in various parts of Denmark. Of the five additional travelling companies, all private, playing during the same season, only one, lead by Axel Illum, devoted itself to serious drama. It played only *Anne Frank's Diary*. The other companies gave more popular comedies, the best of which was probably Terence Rattigan's *The Sleeping Prince*. One of these companies is worth special mention

because of its connection with the Danish coöperative movement, for whose members it last season gave performances of comedies by Madeleine Bingham and Marcel Aymé.

A possibility which remains unexploited in Denmark is summer theater. Several reviews are given annually near vacation spots, but there is no summer theater as we know it in the United States. For many years *Hamlet* was performed by foreign companies for a week or two in the courtyard of Kronborg Castle at Elsinore and attracted many visitors from abroad. The vagaries of the Danish climate continue to make the venture financially risky and it was abandoned after 1954. Last summer the Odense company did give several open-air performances of *The Taming of the Shrew* at different places in Jutland. The summer before, the Royal Theater sent out a travelling company playing *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. These performances are, however, scarcely of interest to foreign visitors. A play by Holberg is given annually at the open-air museum of the city of Aarhus during a summer month and occasionally there have been efforts at similar engagements elsewhere, but they have not been particularly successful. The only attempt at summer theater in Copenhagen in 1958 was made by the Copenhagen parks system, which financed several performances of Giraudoux's *Supplement du Voyage de Cook*.

Unlike American universities and colleges with their ubiquitous university and experimental theaters, institutions of higher learning in Denmark make no attempt to support a stage, located as they are in cities which possess legitimate theater, although, to be sure, every secondary school undertakes an annual performance of some kind. Members of the academic community have ample opportunity to see plays if they have the price of a ticket. There is a chair in the history of the theater at the University of Copenhagen, but there is no practical instruction in dramatic art there or at sister institutions. Young men and women who aspire to careers in the theater must seek specialized training given in conjunction with several stages. To judge by the many excellent actors in Denmark and the number of plays which win critical acclaim each season, this arrangement is quite satisfactory. There is nevertheless one noteworthy association between the theater and several institutions of higher learning. These institutions climax their annual commemorations with gala performances at the Royal Theater, with the King and Queen regularly in attendance.

A concluding word should be said about the lot of the Danish dramatist. He—and there are no women dramatists in Denmark today—not only receives adequate compensation if his play is given at a Danish theater; he also receives an honorarium for every performance of a play over the radio. And if his play is published, he can be sure of some royalty. Finally, if he is considered an established writer, he will qualify

for an annual grant from that part of the national budget which is reserved for the encouragement of the arts.

P. M. MITCHELL

NEW LIFE IN CHILE'S THEATER

PLAYS, BOTH RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR, were being presented in most of the rest of Spain's New World before the inhabitants of New Extremadura, later to be called Chile, saw their first performances. Churchmen looked unkindly on the drama as an educational device. Indian warfare, too, left little leisure for acting, and that lack of natural wealth that had discouraged Almagro as early as 1536, continued to have an adverse influence. For the growth of a natural theater, not only are dramatists and actors necessary, but there must be a public able and willing to pay for the performances or a wealthy patron with a love of the stage. This combination has rarely existed in Chile.

The first play in Santiago, Chile, is generally dated September 11, 1633, when Governor Lazo de la Vega, following recovery from a serious illness, sponsored a performance in gratitude to his patron saint. The first non-religious performance in Chile took place farther south, in Concepción, in 1693, when loyal citizens enacted *The Chilean Hercules* to welcome to Chile's frontier Governor Marín de Poveda and his new bride from Peru. Two unnamed citizens wrote this tragedy of the Araucanian Chief Caupolicán, and it disappeared, probably in flames during a raid by the Araucanian Indians.

Not until 1778 did Santiago enjoy a real theatrical season, which came to an end through churchly antagonism. An ambitious manager, José Rubio, offered a program of twenty performances, but Bishop Alday who was absent when the request was made, interposed so violently that the venture was not repeated. Indeed it was only the drama-loving Governor Ambrosio O'Higgins who was able to silence the Reverend Fathers and finally encourage plays. His son, the first president of the republic, on the theory that the stage was a school, used public funds in 1818 to build the first national theater. Then independent Chile began to find a few enthusiastic amateurs to write plays to vary the fare of translations and importations from Spain.

In 1842, the son of the grammarian Andrés Bello wrote *Love Affairs of the Poet* but the audience packed the theatre more from curiosity about the real identity of the characters than through love of drama. Again in the 60's, several plays seemed to promise Chile a place in the world of the drama, like Carlos Walker's historical *Manuel Rodríguez*, but the theater lacked actors and public. Indeed in the whole 19th Century, Chile produced only four dramatists with ability that might have been developed if they had lived in a country of greater theatrical activity. Roman Vial (1833-1896) described Chilean customs in a

series of short farces. Juan Rafael Allende (1850-1909) satirized his countrymen in plays long and short. Daniel Caldera (1852-1896) wrote one tragedy *Tribunal of Honor* (1877) with a Chilean theme, but was discouraged in spite of its success and turned to newspaper work. The fourth was Daniel Barros Grez (1834-1904), a Chilean Bretón de los Herreros for humor and social criticism, who proved his modernity of spirit when several of his plays were recently revived. Obviously, Chile cannot be said to have displayed much theatrical activity before the Twentieth Century.

In 1914, the folklorist and dramatist Díaz Meza organized the Sociedad de Autores Teatrales de Chile to sponsor El Teatro Chileno for national plays, performed by Alejandro Flores and Luisa Alfaro. In 1918, under the sponsorship of this same group, the comedian Arturo Bührle and the character actor Enrique Báguena made a barn-storming circuit of Chile with a national repertoire that included work by one of the greatest of the country's playwrights, Armando Moock (1894-1942), a member of the company. Chile's other outstanding dramatist, Antonio Acevedo Hernández (1886—), completed his masterpiece, *Almas perdidas*, just in time for their departure.

So successful was their tour and so quick were other dramatists to appear with plays for production that the critic Victor Domingo Silva was moved to write that the Golden Moment of Chilean drama was looming. But unfortunately, the nations of the world discovered that nitrate from the air could replace the mineral that was the basis of Chile's economy, and with an additional blow from the depression of 1929, the Chilean peso dropped to a quarter of its value. Chileans became too engrossed in the work of making a living to have time for the play world of the theater.

Yet drama in the nation did not die. Students of the University of Chile made a mighty effort to revive it. Their story is too long to tell in its entirety, but in 1934 Pedro de la Barra and some friends in the Instituto Pedagógico formed a troupe of players to give the working classes a chance to see farces by Lope de Rueda and Cervantes. At first they got no encouragement from their university. However, after the establishment of their successful Experimental Theatre in 1941, their Alma Mater began supporting them, and has done so enthusiastically ever since. Money is budgeted for mounting plays, for overseas scholarships, and for prizes in playwriting competitions that have brought in as many as fifty entries.

As part of its educational campaign, the group performs outstanding foreign plays, also, but its main purpose is to give local dramatists a hearing. A number of contemporary Chilean play from manuscripts have appeared in their programs. Benjamin Morgado says in his *Parcial Eclipse del Teatro chileno* that the Dirección del Teatro Nacional under

Luis Valenzuela Arís and the Experimental Theatre are the main hopes of drama in Chile.

Another group of amateurs under Pedro Mortheiru at the Catholic University has also come into being, spurred by the success of the original group. So in Chile, plays are being produced, which is encouraging, and plays are being published, which is still better proof of a renaissance of Chile's theater.

A listing of all the young practicing dramatists of Chile would be less enlightening than a brief look at four among them who have written enough to indicate promise for the future.

Connected with the Experimental Theatre since its beginning and now listed as Director of Extension is Enrique Gajardo. He was born in the provinces, in 1923, and reached Santiago in 1938 as student in the Instituto Inglés, an American missionary school where half the instruction each day was in English. Incidentally, many of the theatrical figures of Chile use English fluently. The actor Rubén Sotoconil, and Roberto Parada and his wife María Maluenda, speak and read it. So does Mirella Latorre, daughter of the critic Mariano Latorre, who has finally found her niche on the stage.

Though Gajardo had been an actor at the age of nine, he went to the University to specialize in History and Geography, but his college companions persuaded him to give the stage a try, and he succumbed. Most of his early efforts at playwriting have been lost. Recently he completed a drama trilogy for adolescents. One of two short plays by him is his off-beat *The Secret*. In its Prologue, dead Juan addresses the audience. He died just as he was trying to tell his wife his important secret. The play presents the scandalous surmises of his acquaintances about what he had left unsaid. At the end Juan reveals his secret to the audience: he had never told his wife how much she meant to him and had tried at the end to let her know. *El secreto* is well-developed, with suspense and surprise, and with a modern technique that makes one eager to see his other plays. Gajardo has been busy with many other phases of Chile's renaissance of the theater. He has founded many amateur groups and is active in FEMOTCH, established in 1956 to coordinate these groups. In radio, in the newspaper, and as professor of Drama, giving courses at the University of Chile, he is helping bring Chile its surge of life.

Gajardo's writing remains unpublished; more fortunate was a Santiago physician, writing under the pen name of "Andrés Terbay." Dr. Roberto Sarah was born in Parral in 1918, and prepared in Santiago for his medical career. In 1938 while still in the university, he submitted his *Las idolatras* in the competition of the Dirección General de Teatro, where it received second prize. It no longer exists. In 1940, the author lent the manuscript to a visiting Argentine actor who reported

it has been lost, though there are rumors of subsequent performances in Argentina under a different title. The 1949 competition of the Experimental Theatre next tempted Dr. Sarah. As the first prize winner, his *Some day* opened on Christmas night, 1949, and even though it was summer, it went on to 50 performances, with Pepe Rojas and Elvira Travesi in the leading roles and Alejandro Flores also in the cast. Then after a tour, it returned to the capital for another long run and two more honors, the Municipal prize and the Caupolicán Award of the radio and drama critics. Besides performances in Peru, Margarita Xirgu's National Uruguayan Company played it in Santiago in April 1955, and later at the Teatro Solis, in Montevideo. An English translation had a showing at the Playwrights Club, London, in 1951.

The play covers three epochs, ten years apart, beginning in 1930. In the prologue, a playwright seeking a theme is urged by his wife to dramatize the daily life of a nobody, with its monotony and the vague hopes that something will happen "some day." So, in life-like conversation and convincing psychology, this contemporary tragedy involves a middle class family "in any city of America where homesickness and hope touch the heart of man." Old Gregorio, an Italian immigrant, has dreams of earning enough money from his store to return some day. His daughter Paulina hopes to become a concert pianist. His son Daniel wants to be a famous football star, and a friend, the reporter, Vicente, aspires to marry another daughter, Yolanda, and write a great novel.

The final curtain twenty years later finds Daniel content merely to referee a football game. Paulina is now playing on the radio for a soap program and the dissolute Vicente is only existing.

Since its enthusiastic acclamation as an important step in Chilean drama, its modest author has completed three more plays, not yet printed. *The Red Collar* was introduced in 1952 by the Américo Vargas troupe. *The Traveler Leaves at Dawn*, performed the same year by Flores, was coldly received by critics, but the public liked it and so does this writer. His three act *In the Forbidden Shadows* was the 1952 Teatral Experimental prize play. Through journalistic commitments and a long stay in Europe and the Middle East have halted Dr. Sarah's writing, these two drama prizes and his 1958 prize winning *A Light Through the Rain* earn him a place in the contemporary theater of his country.

Another dramatist combining writing with a profession is the dentist, Maria Asunción Requena. She is associated with the Teatro de Ensayo of the Catholic University as Dr. Sarah is a product of the University of Chile. Born in Punto Arenas in 1918, Dr. Requena spent her childhood in Spain, then got her dental training in Santiago and returned to Punta Arenas to practice dentistry.

Her initial attempt at drama, *Mr. Jones Arrives at Eight O'Clock*,

set in the pampas of Patagonia, won first prize in the 1952 Teatro Nacional competition. The next year, her *Fuerte Bulnes* won the only prize given by the Experimental Theatre, which gave it a superlative performance in August, 1955. She has just finished the tragedy, *The Fox Breeder of Magallanes*, whose heroine administers a large estate and cannot decide between her passion for a man and her love of the land and those who work it. Her *Pan Caliente* was considered the best play submitted in the 1958 contest.

Now Doña María has embarked on a difficult play, treating Bernardo O'Higgins as a man. Gloria Moreno, another outstanding dramatist of Chile, wrote a trilogy, *The Final Victory*, about O'Higgins, the patriot. Dr. Requena wants to show the effect upon him of his loveless youth and his overpowering hatred of Carrera. She hopes to have it ready for the Chilean Playwrights' competition just announced by the Nuevos Dramaturgos Chilenos, a kind of workshop group of the Teatro de Ensayo.

Fuerte Bulnes, her only printed play, appearing in the University of Chile magazine in 1953, deals with Chile's colony in the rainy south two years after the fort was built in 1843. Its twenty-nine speaking characters and hordes of Colonists, Soldiers, and Indians, make it more like the Jamestown pageant than a dramatic play. The love of Colonist Sebastián for Onahe, daughter of the mestizo chief of the Indians, is the thread that holds it together, but the excellence of the play lies in the portrayal of the hardships of the colonists, their dissatisfaction, and desire to forsake the Fort. It concludes with a patriotic flourish. The chief of the colony's Indian enemies had once served under the new governor, and through loyalty to his old commander and affection for his daughter, who prefers a Spanish husband to the Indian chief selected for her, he befriends the colonists, and so the Fort endures.

One other Chilean writer will conclude this look at the current dramatists. Dinka de Villarroel was born in Antofagasta, December 6, 1909, in the nitrate region, where she set her medal-winning *Campamentos* of 1945. Its characters are well-drawn. It contrasts Juan José Urzúa, who works for the betterment of the laborers, with Dennis Smith, the foreign engineer who is willing to sacrifice even his daughter, Evelyn, for his advancement. Her love for José gives opportunity for a "happy ending." There is abundance of action, too, as well as some homey bits of philosophy. Though Sra. Villarroel disclaims any ambition to be "una escritora social," she does show a keen interest in social problems.

Her shorter comedy *La carta*, prize-winner in a Santiago competition, has been recently revised as *The Birthmark*. Its chief character is Lucia, a student from the provinces. She is loved by the sophisticated poet and story writer, Germán, whose poem about the mole on her thigh

provides violence and complication until her appearance in a Bikini bathing suit clarifies everything.

For another and more dramatic play, doña Dinka turned to the Araucanian region near her present home in Lota, and wrote *The Final Trap*, about the clash between white land owners and their ignorant *inquilinos*. There are no characters really worthy of admiration. Tía Trini, the octogenarian matriarch and a salty character, revenges her brother by burning an Indian chief who killed him in resentment at being cheated out of tribal land, but the author is not trying to show any class as admirable. Her comment is: "Social problems interest me only as psychological factors, where the permanent forces of Good and Evil meet in conflict." She has also seen their working out in her recent *Appointment at the Cabin*.

These are a few of the playwrights who are writing plays in Chile today. The old idea that only tragedy is artistic, no longer permeates them. They select any form necessary to present their story and its implications. Many are students of the European and the U.S. theater, but for setting, they portray their own surroundings and there are many challenging plays appearing that interpret Chile. With opportunities to see their work on the stage in the increasing number of drama groups, and with substantial prizes encouraging all of them and rewarding some, Silva's prediction about the dawn of the golden moment of Chile's theater may well be in process of fulfillment, forty years after he made it.

WILLIS KNAPP JONES

BOOK REVIEWS

THE THEATER AND ITS DOUBLE, by Antonin Artaud, translated by Mary Caroline Richards, Grove Press, Inc., New York, 1958, 159 pp. Price \$1.95.

When in 1946 Antonin Artaud was released from a nine-year confinement in an insane asylum, the occasion was celebrated by a ceremony at the Théâtre Sarah Bernhardt. The fact that Charles Dullin, Jean Vilar, Jean-Louis Barrault and Roger Blin were among those present to pay tribute to the poet and the man, is some indication of the rôle Artaud plays in the contemporary French theater. The vitality of his ideas today, ten years after his death, has not diminished, and is confirmed not only by frequent mentions in the many French periodicals devoted to the theater, but by the direction the avant-garde theater has taken in the works of Beckett, Ionesco, and particularly Adamov.

The Theater and its Double, Artaud's most important writing devoted to the theater, is not a homogenous work, but rather a collection of essays and letters, enthusiastic, colorful, ardent, often fanatical, describing his ideas, or rather his ideals, for a radical revolution in the theater. Artaud's major thesis is that "the stage is a concrete physical place which asks to be filled, and to be given its own concrete language to speak." Therefore, he would do away with the author and the text, and replace them by a *metteur en scène* (director) who is in complete control. The Occidental theater, he claims, is only a theater of dialogue, a verbal theater, and through dialogue it is not possible to touch the sources of life in the unconscious. To fulfill the purpose of the theater ("to break through language in order to touch life") we must invent a language which is purely theatrical, using space and movement, and compounded of symbolic gestures (hieroglyphs), bodily rhythms, music, lights, sounds, cries, and even words. For Artaud does not entirely reject spoken language, but merely wishes to reduce its rôle in the theater, using it as a physical presence, rather than for its intellectual connotations: language becomes intonation, incantation.

Artaud constantly refers to the Balinese theater, and devotes an entire chapter to that subject, for he believes that the theater of Bali is the embodiment of his ideals. Many other exotic elements are present in the book: the Cabala with its mystical number three, Hindu systems of breath control, the principles of alchemy. Artaud, like many other surrealists, was intrigued by the unusual, for the unusual seemed to him to be a pathway toward the ineffable which is more real (or surreal) than that which reason has desiccated. The surrealist bias is seen frequently in *The Theater and its Double*: the reality of imagination and dreams must appear in the theater on an equal footing with life, the theater must be liberated, the brain of the spectator (who is no longer spectator, but participator) must be overcome by a "more or less hallucinatory state," the theater must address the unconscious.

One is tempted to outline all the exciting ideas which Artaud expresses in his book. For anyone acquainted with the French theater, even a cursory reading reveals roots which have borne fruit in the popular theater movement, in the attitudes of some of the recent *metteurs en scène*, and in the writings of the latest generation of dramatists. There are manifestoes and letters describing and defending the famous "Theater of Cruelty" (whose title has undoubtedly led to misunderstanding), and a famous chapter on "The Theater and the Plague," as well as notes on the Marx Brothers, language, and metaphysics.

All of this is written in a vigorous style, with powerful descriptive passages whose clarity and force evoke precisely the image the author desires. One is constantly aware that Artaud is a poet. Miss Richard's translation reproduces energetically the color and movement of the original, and occasionally even surpasses it.

There are, undoubtedly, weaknesses in Artaud's arguments, and the theater he describes is perhaps an impossible one, but the conception is grandiose. *The Theater and Its Double* is stimulating and challenging, and will not cause luke warm reactions, for it is the work of a man convinced, who is sometimes overzealous and unfair. Certainly Artaud is right in many respects, and has given an incisive impulse in the right direction when he seeks a return to the magical religious sources of theater. "The true purpose of the theater," he tells us, "is to create Myths, to express life in its immense, universal aspect, and from that life to extract images in which we find pleasure in discovering ourselves."

LEONARD C. PRONKO

EUGENE O'NEILL AND THE TRAGIC TENSION: AN INTERPRETIVE STUDY OF THE PLAYS, by Doris V. Falk, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1958, 211 pp. Price —.

Perhaps the only dramatic resolution that Eugene O'Neill shaped with complete success was that of his own death, capped by the monosyllabic ego assertion "O'Neill" on his tombstone. For his plays are a series of powerful symbolic skirmishes between the unresolved components of the self. Sometimes one even gets the feeling that a play like *Long Day's Journey Into Night* is less a family portrait than it is one of those curious mirror studies of a single individual multiplied, or rather, we might say, a study in the refracted ego.

The "tragic tension" of Miss Doris Falk's excellent monograph, is that which results from the clash of the various aspects of self, as they have been schematized by Dr. Karin Horney. The "characterology" of Horney, with occasional support from Eric Fromm, is employed in a sensitive, chronological analysis of O'Neill's plays, including a play of such recent release as *A Touch of the Poet*. Furthermore, the study is Jungian to the extent that O'Neill's characters seem to associate themselves with the universal subconscious, especially in its identification with the sea. While Miss Falk can approve of Dr. Philip Weissmann's diagnosis of the "sublimation of Oedipal drives" in O'Neill, hers is no psychoanalytical approach nor is she disposed to treat play as case history. Miss Falk is a literary critic with enough psychoanalytic equipment to stand her in good stead. She is notably sensible and restrained in her intent.

Best of all, she suffers no illusions about O'Neill. She may observe, somewhat portentously, that "his heroes . . . are doomed to assert their humanity by a struggle with ghosts in the dark night of the soul," and yet she is frank to admit that O'Neill had trouble imparting that humanity. She is, I think, the first to touch on the real failure of O'Neill when she remarks, almost off-handedly on her first page, that "irony requires a detachment which he found impossible." It was the absence of irony, in an art form that subsists on it, that marked the failure of Eugene O'Neill. When Miss Falk can find "circles of ironic significance," they radiate from a dramatic situation like the curtain speech of *Desire Under the Elms*, when the Sheriff remarks "It's a jim-dandy farm, no denyin'." And she finds "the best explanation of the meaning of dramatic tragedy" in Smithers' final comment in *Emperor Jones*: "Gawd blimey, but yer died in the 'eighth o' style, any'ow!" Always, the abomination of O'Neill's language, whether it is the crassly American little-boy speech or inept

dialect! Even to drama, and perhaps especially to drama, we may apply Mallarmé's dictum, "A poem is made, not of ideas, but words."

Whatever Miss Falk may reveal about language or dramatic irony, however, is secondary to her business-like concern with the action and reaction of character in the play. She is not an aficionado, nor is she "trying to like O'Neill." Her search is for "order and coherence" in O'Neill's characters on the basis of what is consciously Jungian and an unconscious anticipation of Horney and Fromm. Her conclusion is that O'Neill's vision was to a degree affirmative, and certainly existential: "The tragic tension between opposite masks does result in a kind of creativity and action, to be sure, but it is not directed toward the objective world which demands such action. It is directed within and against the self. In this sense the tension is not really a supporting framework, a psychological and normal order within which one can move and produce. It is a trap where one is doomed to lifelong participation in a conflict between values and self-conceptions." If, then, Miss Falk occasionally finds herself in the limbo of *ur*-personality, it is only natural, because that is the home of these O'Neill people.

RICHARD B. VOWLES

HELEN IN EGYPT AND OTHER PLAYS, by John Heath-Stubbs, London, Oxford Press, 1958, 127 pp. Price \$3.00.

John Heath-Stubbs' is the most recent contribution to the type of religious verse play made popular by John Masefield and later strengthened by T. S. Eliot, Charles Williams, Christopher Fry, and Dorothy Sayers. Two of the three plays in his *Helen in Egypt and other Plays* are written for a church audience. Like their medieval counterparts, they make contemporary biblical incidents. *The Talking Ass* and *The Harrowing of Hell*, as well as *Helen*, are demonstrations of his belief that traditional values can be maintained only at the price of continued change flexibility.

Mr. Heath-Stubbs, in his "Preface," makes large claims for the literary ancestry of *The Talking Ass*. From the Elizabethans comes the underlying symbolic-structure and from W. B. Yeats and Berthold Brecht is derived a non-naturalistic approach. It is from Aristophanes, however, that he absorbs his fundamental inspiration for the creation of "a lyrical, canonical, liturgical farce, a topical joke with a pantomime donkey." It might be recalled that the craftsman at York and Chester accomplished the same end in a less self-conscious manner.

One must not forget Mr. Heath-Stubbs' admonition that traditional values are maintained at the price of change. The old order of the mysteries are not for us. Our society seeks an intelligent, not an emotional, religion. The Twentieth-century Angel of the Lord's benediction upon the spectators of *The Talking Ass* is no simple "peace be with you," but

Learn then, in humbleness and charity,
And not in prophesying nor in tongues,
Salvation lies, not yet in formulas
Of words, of metaphysics, or of physics;
So may the sweet Spirit prove your true Comforter,
To Whom now, with the Father and the Son,
Be glory everlasting, Amen.

Balaam, the Prophet, has learned that although he is tangled in an ambiguous net of words and is the plaything of powers he does not understand, he has been allowed a brief vision of the future King of Kings, Redeemer, Saviour. The offers of riches and powers from King Balak if he curses the Israelites may appeal to

Balaam's wife, but he casts off the power of his evil Djinn and allies himself with the future. Even the forsaken ass is comforted:

God will not despise you;
When late in time He comes, He will be content
To share a stable-stall with the ox and you;
And He shall ride you to Jerusalem
Upon His day of palm-boughs and hosannas.

The Harrowing of Hell is more rigid, more static, and rightly so. The author's aim is to give a liturgical shape to the playlet that it may properly substitute for a sermon on Easter Even. The introduction of well-known hymns, the echoes of biblical texts, the use of verse throughout, and use of Uriel, Angel of the Sun, as Chorus-narrator remind the audience that they are attending a rite to celebrate the phenomena of death and rebirth, the setting and the rising of the sun. The flow of history out of superstition into reason is channeled through Adam and Eve, Satan and his minions; Abraham, David, and Isaiah; Plato, Cato, and Virgil; to Christ the Redeemer.

The Harrowing efficiently accomplishes what it sets out to do. Designed as a triptych, the first scene welcomes to Paradise Dismas, the penitent thief. The second, set at the brighter edges of Hell, brings together Pagans, Hebrews, the Satanic crew, and Judas. The devils drag Judas deeper into Hell while the Archangel Michael liberates those great spirits born before the death of Christ. The last scene, true to medieval tradition, is on the third level—the earth. Here the three Marys stand before the Tomb. A portion of the dialogue between Mary the Mother and Mary Magdalene illustrates the degree of Mr. Heath-Stubbs' perception and skill. Magdalene recalls the raising of her brother Lazarus. "Surely," she says, "we knew then He was Lord of Life, and Death."

MOTHER: Yet you, Mary, anointed Him for His burial—
At the feast, in Simon's house. Do you remember?

MAGDALENE: These were the words He used. I did not think of it that way.
I only wanted to do—something—just to show
What He had done for me, for what He was.
And so I brought, and broke, my precious box of ointment.

MOTHER: It was a lovely thing to do.

MAGDALENE: He said that too, when Judas looked askance,
Because it was extravagance. Love is extravagance;
All beauty is extravagance.

The title play, *Helen in Egypt*, described as a romantic comedy, is the most successful. Early in his "Preface" the author states: "If drama is to be poetic, it must also in some degree be formal and ritualistic. But it must also be lyrical, and above all, it must not be pompous." By opposing the old order of Egypt with her superstitious rituals against the new civilization of Greece, Mr. Heath-Stubbs works out his dual themes of the meaning of history and the nature of truth in a way that is formal but not pompous, poetic rather than lyrical.

Fleeing from Sparta, Paris and Helen stop in Egypt. There Helen is entombed in suspended animation within the temple of Hathor (Aphrodite, Ishtar). A phantom Helen is created and sent to Troy. The comedy begins with the landing of the phantom Helen and Menelaus on the shores of Pharos, shortly after the end of the Trojan War. While the Greeks are there, the true Helen is brought back to life, ten years older. Menelaus must choose between the ageless phantom and the ageing Helen. His choice closes the Era of Magic and commences History.

By poking fun at the pompous formulas of the Chief Chamberlain to the Pharaoh,

by describing the homely practices of the Greek physician, by underscoring the weariness and disillusionment of the Greek sergeant, Mr. Heath-Stubbs manages to remove from his play any overtones of sentimental romance, magic illusions. He offers instead reality wrapped in verse.

Helen, more than *The Talking Ass* or *The Harrowing*, begs the problem of the poet in the theater. Is verse drama a freak? Are the works of Eliot, Fry, Anderson better played in the sideshow rather than in the main tent? Eliot fails as a dramatist; Anderson, as a poet. Fry fares a little better. What of Heath-Stubbs? *Helen*, for all its good humor, its theatrical moments, its intelligence, is too academic to appeal to the spectators attracted to the main tent. Fit, though few, the congregations of St. Dingle's-in-the-Dell will not be discomforted by *The Talking Ass* and *The Harrowing of Hell*.

VEDDER M. GILBERT

BOOKS RECEIVED

(The appearance of a book in *Books Received* does not preclude its subsequent review.)

The Theater and its Double, by Antonin Artaud, Grove Press Inc., New York, 1958, 159pp. Price \$1.95.

The Maids, by Jean Genet, with an introduction by Jean-Paul Sartre, Grove Press Inc., New York, 1954, 102pp. Price \$1.25.

The Balcony, by Jean Genet, Grove Press Inc., New York, 1958, 118pp. Price \$1.75.

Lorca: The Poet and His People, by Arturo Barea, Grove Press Inc., New York, 1949, 176pp. Price \$1.45.

Three Plays: Amedee, The New Tenant, Victims of Duty, by Eugene Ionesco, Grove Press Inc., New York, 1958, 166pp. Price \$1.75.

Bernard Shaw and the Nineteenth-Century Tradition, by Julian B. Kaye, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, Oklahoma, 1958, 222pp. Price \$4.00.

Separate Tables, by Terrance Rattigan, Signet Book, The New American Library, New York, 1959, 127pp. Price \$.35.

The Vasa Trilogy, August Strindberg, Translated by Walter Johnson, University of Washington Press, Seattle, 1959, 341pp. Price \$6.00.

The Saga of the Folkungs, Engelbrekt, by August Strindberg, Translated by Walter Johnson, University of Washington Press, Seattle, 1959, 204 pp. Price \$4.00.

Renaissance Cavalier, by John S. White, Philosophical Library, Inc., New York, 1959, 65pp. Price \$3.50.

A Glossary to the Plays of Bernard Shaw, by Paul Kozelka, Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, 55pp. Price \$1.50.

Irony in the Drama, by Robert Boies Sharpe, The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1959, 215pp. Price \$5.00.

Guide to Play Selection, Second Edition, by the Committee on Playlist of the National Council of Teachers of English, Appleton-Crofts, Inc., New York, 1958, 178pp. Price \$3.50.

Three Japanese Plays from the Traditional Theatre, edited with introductions by Earle Ernst, Oxford University Press, London, 1959, 200pp. Price \$6.00.

The Nature of Drama, Part Two of *An Introduction to Literature*, edited with introductions by Hubert Heffner, Houghton Mifflin Company, The Riverside Press, Cambridge, Boston, 1959, 662pp.

Shaw on Education, by Louis Simon, Columbia University Press, New York, Morningside Heights, 1958, 290pp. Price \$5.50.

The Renaissance Stage, translated by Allardyce Nicoll, John H. McDowell. Edited by Barnard Hewitt. University of Miami Press, Coral Gables, Florida, 1958, 256pp. Price \$5.50.

International Theatre Annual, No. 3, edited by Harold Hobson, London, 1958, 232pp. Price 25s.

Play within a Play, The Dramatist's Conception of his Art: Shakespeare to Anouilh, by Robert J. Nelson, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1953, 182 pp. Price \$4.00.

